HEAVEN LOOKS

LIKE US

PALESTINIAN POETRY

Edited by **George Abraham** and **Noor Hindi**

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Praise for
HEAVEN LOOKS LIKE US

“A necessary anthology that burns with the ferocity of our people, who refuse to be erased. Urgent, unflinching, and gloriously alive, these poems remind us that to be Palestinian is to be a revolution.”
—Randa Jarrar, author of *Love Is an Ex-Country*

“Shattered. Gutted. A gut-punch. Devastated. This broke me. I keep thinking about all the violent ways we describe how we feel in relation to art. It is woefully insufficient. This brilliant anthology did not wound me—did no harm, at all—if anything, its target is empire. These poems evoked in me the profound depths and range of human thinking and being encompassed in the words Palestine, Arab, love, and resistance; I will be forever grateful for this ferocious reminder of what it means to be alive.”
—Omar Sakr, author of *The Lost Arabs*

“Heaven Looks Like Us is a book every classroom, every library, and every poet should celebrate. This necessary, urgent, and historic volume heralds a revolutionary poetics that remakes our necrotic world. In a time when Palestinian poets are silenced, beaten, tortured, and murdered for their truth telling, we have this liberatory chorus. This is poetry that makes us alive. This is a gift that dares to sing, dares to punch empire in the neck. I am grateful for its abundance, its grace, its refusal, its rage, its love, its imaginatory force, its regeneration. Let this book spur its readers to action —any and all actions— until we are all free.”
—Cathy Linh Che, author of *Split*

“Poetry is the language of our people. It is the language of resistance. *Heaven Looks Like Us* offers hope, rage, resilience, memory, and dreams.

This book is the distillation of a Palestinian future, the taste of freedom . . . a glimpse of what is to come."

—Hannah Moushabeck, author of *Homeland: My Father Dreams of Palestine*

HEAVEN LOOKS LIKE US

PALESTINIAN POETRY

Edited by George Abraham and Noor Hindi

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Acknowledgments

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INTRODUCTION

We are writing from one of the darkest moments of Palestinian history, into a future whose shape, let alone existence, is unknowable to us. It is January 2024. We are over a hundred days into the latest iteration of Zionist genocide in Gaza, and with the necrotic weight of unknowable thousands of slaughtered kin—each a whole universe of dreams, hopes, wonders, beauties, stolen from us too soon—we sing.

After the threshold of apartheid—after the slaughter of arms and white phosphorous became the genocide of bombed hospitals and starving streets—we sing.

After realizing the sheer number of times we've been here before—after siege after impossible siege, after *after*—after nakba made a repetition of us—after repetition made a nakba of us—we sing.

Poetry, for our people, has always been a kind of im/possible music. We remember Kanafani who wrote of the filaheen left behind in the Nakba of 1948—farmers and workers who, in their labor of love to the land, remembered details of our ethnically cleansed villages with field songs. It is here, in a tradition of resisting such annihilation, that our revolutionary verses stake their origin, and hail people to join our fight, as Mahmoud Darwish once wrote:

> Dust of my country I rebel for you.
> Returning brother I rebel for you.

Against a colonial regime that dis-remembered the basic facts of us via archival looting, theft, and plunder—with both the *unwriting* and *paving*

over implicit to all acts of erasure—the shape of our memory left behind is not one of empire's narrative telos, but of catastrophe's timeless and fragmented lyric.

From the singular wound of our becoming Palestinian, we emerge as mirror and agitator: we live our deaths in exile, trespassing border after failed border, presencing ourselves in every tongue that fails to hold the weight of us, translating wound into word into world.

We are writing from the event horizon of another world. And thus, the times are filled, impossibly, with terror.

Let us be clear: we come not to present institutionally sanitized, stakesless poetry, as is typical in hegemonic Anglophone spaces, especially in the US. We sing as the embodied aftermath of the cost of western imperial *living.* We come as swarm, as multitude and multiverse. We come to un-craft, dismantle, and re-imagine the imperial tools of language that made our unwriting possible to begin with.

We come acknowledging the weight of the slaughtered writers that brought us to this moment: intellectuals like Ghassan Kanafani and Refaat Alareer who terrified the state with their brilliance, journalists like Shireen Abu Akleh and the over 100 martyred in 2023 alone for witnessing the ongoing genocide in Gaza—murdered poets like Heba Abu Nada who, looking death in the face, teach life with every breath.

Against a failed literary imagination that can only digest us in death and suffering—against institution after illiterate institution censoring the basic truth of us—against every cowardly writer refusing to speak out, even as poets in our community are kidnapped, imprisoned, tortured, even martyred for their words—we come with the insistence that the Anglophone world bears witness to our living.

We sing like the whole world is at stake. We sing *because* the whole world is at stake.

*

We are writing from the event horizon of another world. And thus, the times are filled, terrifyingly, with possibility.

Our journey took us across the globe, connecting with Palestinians living and dead, writing against settler nations like the US and Australia, against the lingering effects of British occupation and continued western imperial support for the Zionist regime, against our ongoing ethnic cleansing in our homeland, daring to occupy—dare we say break—language with the sheer weight of us. Poetry, itself, requires a supremely intimate attention to language, even and especially when listening to the spaces where language fails us.

And here, we return to Fargo Tbakhi's line that inspired our title: *Heaven Looks Like Us.* There's a heft to it—to this notion of *us*—that emblematizes the spirit of this massive anthology. There's a metonymic inversion at the center of its logic: the "we" of our anthology does not want to reduce itself into as convenient a myth as heaven understood in some narrow religious or moral sense, nor some already-dreamt and necessarilyexclusionary, utopian sense. Against such reductions, it is *heaven* that looks like *us*: a heaven super-saturated by the deaths we've suffered at the hands of racist settler colonial necropower, but also a heaven that we make with each other nevertheless a heaven of holding, of unimaginable weight. A heaven of us.

By invoking heaven in the title, we do not mean to imply that this is, in any way, a religious anthology; the history of Palestine has never been a religious conflict. Rather, it has always been a case of settler colonial regimes weaponizing religious mythos—as historian Nur Masalha has argued—for the purpose of erasing the material, lived realities of a people. It is a truth we have long held: in us, the west sees not *us* but their inability to see, and love, their whole selves.

Despite its seeming vastness, this anthology is but a small fragment of our literary production from the year 2000 to present. We do not, and cannot, claim to be definitive, because to do so would be to buy into American myths of representation, which erase the vast complexity of our community by uplifting a select few for the sake of legibility and

palatibility, at the expense of erasing entire worlds of art and potentiality. What you hold in your hands is not a definitive history of Palestinian literature—for projects like that, we recommend Salma Khardra Jayyusi's 1992 *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature.* What you hold in your hands is an intergenerational love letter to a people refusing the annihilation of *now*.

Put differently, the anthology is geographically broad in scope but is anti-universal; it is hefty—dare we say, maximalist—but anti-definitive; it does not seek to represent, but instead seeks to complicate, trouble, unsettle, and (dare we say) terrorize. We resist the material and mythological violences imposed on us by the Zionist regime, built upon western (especially British) colonial obsession with Palestine, built upon a legacy of a Christian hegemonic mythos that fetishizes a land at the expense of its people. If myth, as Larissa Sansour's work suggests, creates fact and identification, then one of the foremost jobs of Palestinian literature today is to resist erasure at the level of myth, which structures our every form of living.

We ask, instead, can we sing a different myth of us in poetry? Can we imagine other modes of being, other languages of love, in poetry?

*

We are writing from the event horizon of another world. Thus, the times are filled, impossibly, with love.

At the center of every poem in this book, regardless of content or form, there is a love story of miraculous proportion.

Here's the miracle of Yusuf Ezidden Salah— a poet born in Lydd in 1928, who arrived in US after being displaced in 1948 and 1967—whose poems come to us in the form of translations of napkin scribbles and papers inherited by his granddaughter.

Here's the miracle of our only anonymous contributor, a Palestinian living within the Zionist state, brought to us via collaboration with Tarik

Dobbs: the loving form of a conversation that holds space for the unsayable, from within a regime that forbids words like “occupation.”

Here’s the miracle of Ashraf Fayadh, a Palestinian political prisoner, whose poem “on the virtues of oil over blood” was quoted nearly in entirety in the Saudi court case that sentenced him to death. Here’s the miracle of his survival, despite, after international outcry—Palestinian sumud embodied into a poetic courage that knows no border.

Here’s the miracle of Queer Palestinian Southerner Rasha Abdulhadi, whose poem “Finished with Peace” connects to the lineage of gay Iraqi Jewish anti-war poet Sigfreid Sassoon. Here’s the miracle of poetry that interrupts failed notions of “peace” with the insistence on Palestinian living.

Here’s the miracle of Gazan poet Mosab Abu Toha messaging us, alive, asking how fast Haymarket Books can expedite this anthology, after surviving being kidnapped and brutalized by the Occupation Forces in 2023.

Here’s the miracle of Najwan Darwish, insisting with every breath that we Palestinians remember the Armenians, today and every day. Here’s the miracle that birthed a response poem from Armenian activist Sophia Armen who wrote, in the middle of Nakba day protests, a poem that remembers Palestinians back. Here’s the miracle of love as entanglement.

Here’s the miracle of all the Black radical poets who gave so much to our language of love and resistance: a love letter to June Jordan from Lena Khalaf Tuffaha, alongside a poem from Mohammed Khader invoking Dionne Brand to give language to his Black and Palestinian family histories, alongside a cento from Zaina Alsous comprised entirely of lines from revolutionary women poets.

Here’s the miracle of every call with Naomi Shihab Nye, who contributed to this anthology not only with her poems, but with her loving advice and faith in us as editors. Here’s the miracle of lesbian elder poet, Micaela Kaibni Raen, who, after discussing her “Queer Tatreez” poem together at AWP, tied pink tatreez bracelets around our wrists.

Here’s the miracle of our every gathering— how, in September 2023, just a month before the latest phase of our ongoing Nakba, many of us

gathered at the Palestine Writes Conference. How we laughed, read, cried, and loved each other in our aliveness. Here's the miracle of running across an impossibly crowded room to hug Maya Abu Al-Hayyat for the first time — the miracle of the birdsong that is her Arabic. Here's the miracle of bilingual readings with Yahya Ashour— the miracle of living Gazan poets. Here's the miracle of living poets older than the Zionist state like Olivia Elias, who first began publishing poetry at the youthful age of 71. Here's the miracle of Huda Fakkhreddine, who works not only to translate Palestinians here, but builds such spaces of safe gathering for us, against an illiterate settler institution that spits on our graves.

Here's the miracle of our departed beloveds, to whom we owe the entire weight of our poems. Here's the miracle of Mourid Barghouti's buttons, of Mahmoud Darwish's horses, of Samih Al-Qasim's sun. Here's the miracle of Refaat Alareer's kite and Heba Abu Nada's starlight: of every protest in 2023 giving flight to their words. Here's the miracle of Salma Khadra Jayyusi, whose unparalleled contributions to bringing Palestinian poetry into English make possible this book's every syllable.

Here's the miracle of The Radius of Arab American Writers (RAWI), of *Mizna*, of every grassroots literary movement built by and for us, without whom many of these poems would not even exist.

Here, poetry gives us the miracle of language activated beyond *witness* and into *with-ness.*

*

We are writing from the event horizon of another world. And thus, we are writing from the event horizon of the im/possible.

Although the times in which we write this introduction are imbued with the urgency of the evolving Nakba in Gaza, this project began several years ago in 2020. As editors, we knew there was a significant need for a new anthology of Palestinian poetry in the Anglosphere, especially given the gaps between our vibrant contemporary poetry community and the youngest poets of many post-1990 anthologies, which end with folks like Naomi

Shihab Nye or Fady Joudah. While many anthologies take scholarly approaches that center institutionally lauded poets as well as those who have already garnered international readership, we know that our future literary community deserves better. As such, we included several authors who have yet to publish widely, alongside elders, some of whom are lauded and some of whom have yet to receive widespread readership. We have chosen to think, instead, about which *people* are precious to our community. The writers assembled here are essential activists, intellectuals, artists, and thinkers. We believe that every one of them is crucial to our cause, and want to uphold a literature of collaboration, not one of exclusivity or literary polish.

And so, we entered this project as siblings by choice, knowing we needed to do our due diligence to center care in our approach, listening to Palestinian elders and editors to shape our editorial process by centering our communal needs. For this, we thank everyone who contributed to this anthology's planning, many of whom are contributors, but especially Lena Khalaf Tuffaha, Huda Fakhreddine, and Fady Joudah. From this project's inception, we knew it would require many years of labor, spent both researching our literary pasts and holding the words of our living artists with the care they deserve. We could have never anticipated the ways this journey would shape our relationship to poetry and to each other, through hundreds of hours of phone calls crying, laughing, dreaming, and co-conspiring. Amidst times we can only describe as catastrophic, the only way forward is a practice of mutual care, for each other, our community, our planet.

To highlight the intergenerational communal nature of this gathering, the poems are organized into cross-temporal, multi-lingual, trans-national conversations. While certain sections are organized by theme, such as ecopoetics and love poems, others are organized by formal interests, such as uplifting recent work building on our long lineage of protest poetry or gathering ars poeticas and other poetic reckonings that enter decades-long conversations on Palestinian, Anglophone, and Arab meta-poesis.

There are many communities we wish were more present in this anthology. Due to financial and linguistic constraints, there is not nearly as much Arabic in this anthology as we would hope for. Although Arabic, French, Danish, and English are present, we regret the disconnections our US literary sphere creates between Palestinian Anglophones and our siblings in Latin America, who comprise among our biggest communities outside the Middle East globally. A Palestinian Latinx anthology is a project that deserves its own devoted editorial team with skillsets beyond our own, and we hope that another press or team will take up such a needed project.

We hope our anthology serves as one small first step in fostering greater inter-connectivity in and beyond our global writing community. We thank our every contributor, wherever you are in the world, for trusting us with your precious words.

We encourage every reader to do what they can to fight for Palestinians while we are still living.

We are asking you to love us, im/possibly.

—George Abraham, with Noor Hindi

Heba Abu Nada

Not Just Passing

translated from the Arabic by Huda Fakhreddine

Yesterday, a star said
to the little light in my heart,
We are not just transients
passing.

Do not die. Beneath this glow
some wanderers go on
walking.

You were first created out of love,
so carry nothing but love
to those who are trembling.

One day, all gardens sprouted
from our names, from what remained
of hearts yearning.

And since it came of age, this ancient language
has taught us how to heal others
with our longing,

how to be a heavenly scent

to relax their tightening lungs: a welcome sigh,
a gasp of oxygen.

Softly, we pass over wounds,
like purposeful gauze, a hint of relief,
an aspirin.

O little light in me, don’t die,
even if all the galaxies of the world
close in.

O little light in me, say:
Enter my heart in peace.
All of you, come in!

OUR BAGS ARE ALWAYS READY

Carolina Ebeid

Palestine the Metaphor

Palestine, the metaphor, says to me

not, I'll not, Palestine the future country
not Palestine the vehicle,

holy o most holy, I'll not theater
the Palestine, not otherwise it, nor

tempest it green and black and red
and black and ash and black war,

I'll not war, Palestine is not a war,
no six day victor come, no

seventh day, its waste of daffodils.

Hala Alyan

Ancestry

I’ll lament the seeds flung
into the ocean. Roots in fish gut

and everywhere the cities leak
mouths. What remains of god is

dwarfed, taken; stars expire
beneath clouds; a comet trickles

ice. All leg and eyelash. I sought
orchards torched. Our fathers tell

the story of this luminous dust,
a soil red as zinnias.

Dalia Taha

The Man and His Girlfriend Who Argued All of Last Night and Now Stand at a Pharmacy in R City to Buy Medication for Headaches

translated from the Arabic by Lena Khalaf Tuffaha

Look.
Over there.
The sea isn’t visible yet,
though we’ve been driving for two hours.
Though we’ve begun to feel its hot moist air.
Though our clothes are sticking to our bodies.

In the car we eat grapes and don’t talk,
as if the sweat oozing from our bodies
is how we communicate now,
how our souls trade words or strikes.

We’re on Highway 6,
I’m on the phone making sure we don’t take the wrong exit,
you’re asking me to pass you something.

And with the same heads
that crossed the checkpoint,
the same neutral expressions that waited while the soldier
looked over our papers,
we turn to take in the empty hills.
Completely empty.

There’s nothing that speaks of the Arab villages
I note and you
nod your beautiful head.

Even the silence that envelopes the scene after a massacre

and never leaves it, the silence
that clings to rocks and trees
and is released by the soil like fumes,
that particular kind of heavy silence,
you know what I mean.
You sense it when you visit the hills of Rwanda or Bosnia,
you feel it instantly—you don’t understand how
it happens, exactly, but you move backwards
as though you aren’t stepping on grass
but on the gasps of the dead.

As if what extends from the trees
aren’t branches but the dead’s last words
standing upright, crows alighting on them.
They tried to get rid of the silence
with highways and the thrum of moving cars.
They tried skillfully to remove everything,
then they tossed their white gloves on the grass.

I feel like I’m performing,
like nothing about what I’m doing is real.
As if what I’m wearing underneath my clothes
isn’t a bathing suit
but a ghost.
No one can return
those villages to the hillside,
it’s over forever,
this is a fixed truth.
I realize this on the way to the sea
and a strange grief fills me,
the sea that isn’t visible yet,
as if it, too, knows and has disappeared,
and nothing but the sweat oozing from our bodies
tells us it’s there.

And because words between us have come
to an end, without saying it out loud,
together, we long to meet it,
while the white gloves on the hills
slowly grow into poison flowers.

—Ramallah

Olivia Elias

Our Bags Are Always Ready

translated from the French by Kareem James Abu-Zeid

We who know exile
our bags are always ready
depart depart
and it’s only in our village
that we’re finally at home
From very ancient memory
I know this land
this warmth
this moisture
I felt them in my mother’s womb
and when I opened my eyes
for the very first time
there was the blue
of her eyes
and all around the deep blue
of the Haifa sky

A blue like the sky of Beirut
before all the concrete and pollution

so blue I used to dive into it
before falling asleep
in the frozen white night
of this great American city
they call Montréal
which turns its back on its own river
to better forget the exile
Blue and still more blue
I felt this warmth
in my mother’s womb
and there was the scent of jasmine
rife in all the gardens of Damascus
there were the pomegranates the figs
the greengages
and all the fruits of paradise

Mourid Barghouti

A Small Eternity

translated from the Arabic by Zeina Hashem Beck

Alone, soaring, my balcony a cloud
in the sky’s gentle hold,
I look out on a beach, a paradise
where the green (whispering, roaring)
has said all it has to say.
A green that almost glows with pistachio-colored edges.
A green that suckles, crawls,
grows into bright apricot
and enters an ornate rust
like an overripe pomegranate skin.
A greyish green escaping a blend of blue,
a pearly green that leans into copper,
a translucent grape-green that leans into
I don’t know what.
The forests rest in slopes that touch
the lake’s silence from all sides,
and the scents of flowers ascend
from the mountain’s foot toward me,
high as earth-bound birds.

The mountains look ancestral,
like our grandfathers who typically know their places,
the mountains are epochs,
and if you look closely, they're the body of time itself.
Adorned with boats, the lake's water resembles
a granddaughter's dress. Half-asleep she listens
to the mountains tell their magical stories
as the shy breeze floats
(through the villages around the water's arc)
almost apologetic for the rustle of leaves.

And I, with two wings that happened suddenly,
soar overlooking this vastness,
and having become a bird perhaps,
I get to realize what a bird's view is, for now.
I said this is a morning of tenderness
for those who observe it,
of scenes that grow tender for one another.
I would need a year
to learn the names of these trees,
plants, blooms, and birds,
a year to learn my name here.
Here, poetry is perfected,
so write as you desire, stranger,
the alphabet desires you here.

I contemplated my body, and it confused me:
under the buttons of this light shirt
there's a present
like a knee that's hit the marble,
and there's a fearsome past
like a wolf that thinks of a child

and insists that I call it a future.
There are my people's houses
that have swapped people,
and losses are arranged
like dictionaries on the shelves.

I shut my body, but my eyes stay open
like my mother's window
which never watched her grandchildren
play in the garden—
though she did witness Yahweh's Army play
with our days, and she lived the reversal of attributes,
the victim's corruption from head to toe,
and the collapse of yearnings and roofs.

Under the buttons of this light shirt,
I continue the work of the living:
I keep Radwa warm,
Majid stays late at my house,
and Umm Munif picks flowers from her garden
as she waits for Munif.
Here we are walking together in the mountains' morning,
we talk and listen, tire, slow down, rest, rush,
rage and forgive,
we forget, get lost a little, ask for directions,
recite one of Al-Mutanabbi's lines,
and laugh at a joke that merges with our tears.

Can I change death's mind and convince it of its failure?
Can death believe I'm walking with my departed's feet?
Because my steps are their steps,

and my eyes are their eyes,
and this poem is their listening.
Do I convince death that they're happening to me now
like salvation or an embrace?
They're happening to me now
so that together we may bear
the burden of this unbearable beauty,
a small eternity surprises us
in this instant indeed: Tamim is about to take a photo
… and I say, Hold on a second:

I will fix Radwa's collar,
draw Munif and my mother closer to me,
and move the tallest, my father and Majid, to the center.
Can death be persuaded that we've been resurrected whole,
slipped from its hands, and flown with the birds?
Above the lake, we became lake,
became mountains and shadows,
and sidewalk cafés.

Here I am banishing longing from my language.
Longing, the confession that breaks

place in two, the body in two, the self in two.
The riverbank is the river.
Without it, we don't call it a river.
The mountains become mountains only with their valleys.
And the flowers, don't they need stems to bloom?
Doesn't a hilt need a sword to live?
Who can separate the bird from the possibilities of wings,
and the waves from the sea?

Who now can separate ship from water?
Who says spring is the absence of summer?
Who separates clouds from shades of white?
There’s no halo in the sky
without a moon at its heart.

Did I just say this
or did my departed improvise it?
I’m not sure,
but I don’t miss them—
they’re here
under the buttons of my light shirt.

Najwan Darwish

The Appearances of Taha Mohammed Ali

translated from the Arabic by Kareem James Abu-Zeid

Though he died two years ago,
Taha Mohammad Ali—
a poet with more compassion
than our grandmothers
(more sorrow and beauty too)—
still wakes inside me,
somewhere
I can’t quite pin down.
Some mornings I hear him
laughing like a newborn in the cradle,
or holding firm as he mutters to himself,
his eyes watering
like a man mourning the entire world.

I heard him clearly this morning.
I knew it was him
when he called me by my name:
“Don’t count me out, Najwan.
I’m too cunning to leave the world—

it wasn’t me they bore on their shoulders,
and it wasn’t me they buried
in the New Cemetery of Nazareth.
My friend, seal of my secrets,
I hid in those obscure regions
in the depths of my friends,
and I hid in the voices of birds
as they sought their daily bread,
and in those prickly pears, whose thorns
can no longer hurt me.
I decided to live forever
in hearts that are purer

than Qastal springs.
(I too used to think of immortality.)
And I’ll hide—and this is between the two of us—
in the dreams of the most seductive women.
I’ll learn how to charm them
with my copious knowledge
of the secrets of the heart
(but don’t mention this
to the mother of my children).

“If you want to find me, look for me
at the door of a kindergarten in a refugee camp
or at a grade school in Stockholm.
I’ll appear
in a preschool in Azerbaijan,
in a preschool in Tashkent,
and in favelas on the Ivory Coast,
and I’ll recite the alphabets of countless languages.
Death has liberated me

from the shackles of our small jailers,
just as poetry has liberated us
from the greatest jailer—time.”

Then Taha went on his way, singing softly,
and as his voice began to fade
I don’t know how I found myself
wiping my grandmother’s tears from my cheeks.

Summer Farah

POEM FOR AKKA BEFORE & AFTER SETTLERS TORCH PALESTINIAN HOMES, MAY 2021

i.
i sing to the sea air in akka
the first & only time
i visit palestine
an american song out
of my american mouth
my cousins practice
their english & i memorize no language
but their voices
we eat white fish & i cry
at every bone i miss
salty tears & salty
sea & salty salt mingling
on my lips oh the sting
is so good when you
love the air that sends it
i know i was happy
once, there is
a photograph to

prove it: my uncle
warm-faced, me
on his shoulders
& a white shawl
to cover my arms
newly baptized
by god, by home,
family flank us
on either side. in akka
i sang
to the sea; seven years
old & my first love
the mediterranean breeze
or maybe it was
tabariyeh oh if only
i could tell the dead
sea i love it too

ii.
i sing

palestine
american s

practice
no
voice

bone s
tear a t
sea
oh

the air
was happy
once

n o
a sh
cover
ed
home

akka

sang
the sea
my love
the breeze

oh
the dead
too

Zena Agha

Elegies for Return

Elegy for Return #1

Let me be clear about what I want. I want return, yes, but more. To turn stones back. I read once about a mosque being made into a bar. Now, I can forgive iconoclasm, but that did offend. You hate when I talk about return but some things just have to be spoken and anyway, my father is older than you and while he never spoke it, he was mighty pleased to see the lemon. I told you it's a kibbutz now. Off route 90, near where Jesus fed five thousand. And so, it is perfectly right that my savage nose of a father was born near Jesus and my grandmother turned chairs into thrones.

Elegy for Return #2

Everyone says it is about land, but I believe it is about time. What are seventy-some years in the grand kaleidoscope of sunsets? And, if three thousand years are what is noted, then certainly every rotation between that moment and this is noteworthy.

Elegy for Return #3

When we are alone, we talk about return. We all think, "good, yes!"

عودة in Arabic is more urgent

One seismic rumble from our throat. One blast, filling our cheeks. One tongue, rapping the backs of teeth. And out, at last! Into this ether. Free.

Then, we all speak, “tomorrow, tonight!”

Elegy for Return #4

I am busy tonight. My love left a watermelon on my doorstep. It reminds me of rebellious women. Lining their roofs. Disobeying in RED WHITE GREEN BLACK. A fuck you. In America, fruit has no feeling, the black seeds bred out. Otherwise I would have dried, fried and salted them. Cracked them in displeasure. Left a trail of shells from A to B on the re-drawn map.

Sarona Abuaker

“my dear, don’t be afraid, it’s nothing, it will pass”

Incessant tongues pluck the mouth
cast iron skillets burn
dowsing yourself in milk won’t do
gulping gallons won’t take out the flame
soothe blisters
bubbles in trachea
— your people are acting like assholes though you have to admit
i turn away from the face
it’s a party turned diplomatic conference
everyone is appointed UN General Secretaries
a private imitation of a public
put on trial eating veggie hotdogs
inhale and choke on Jenny McCartney
dispersion is a separation; a distribution it informs a
movement of scattering from one center to a wide area
the center will not only hold it grows
not imitation that is for
the settlers
parroting perfecting the art of squawking
flying nest the cuckoo

who carries machine guns in the street
smashes its cars into pedestrians
drags Palestinians from their homes
bombs white phosphorous onto children’s
schools
burns olive tree
valleys
chains trees to buildings
they may stomp their feet on the earth
(it spits them back out regurgitating poison)
a colonial masquerading
“heroes of the text and failures of thought”
the text is meant to imitate something they don’t believe
was ever in existence
a ghost a specter
is their blueprint A → B
we give flesh to the void in their imaginations
we become the unimaginable walking running stomping
fucking eating celebrating writing breathing we want to do all
on our land
let’s meet in

[stun— the flash momentarily triggers all cells in the eye that respond to light, blinding it for about five seconds, forcing it to see an afterimage that threatens vision. The amount of volume induced by the detonation also creates temporary deafness and unsettles fluid in the ear, bringing about a loss of balance]

parading around pompous seals slapping their fins on the
rocks dive headfirst into the dead sea
very material playing house with a guillotine, they were the
kids who dismember their barbies in the name of medical

examination
arrest 500 there’s 7 million more not within
your reach
flatten the strip there’s hands
ready to rebuild
if you don’t take it someone
will
if you don’t take it someone else
----doesn’t have to

Newton’s first law of

motion

“An object at
rest stays at
rest
and an object in motion
stays in
motion
with the same
speed
and in the same direction
unless acted upon by
an unbalanced force.”

Objects
“keep on
doing what
they’re
doing.”

Objects

tend to resist changes
in their state of motion [inertia]
structures do not come to a rest do not come to a stop
unless a force greater than itself makes it stop makes it
crumble makes it come to a grinding holt

colonial inertia

properties of matter matters of property
“if i don’t steal it someone else will”

what happens when there is no agreement for the contract
does not want you out the house
it wants you out of the country and even when you’re
outside of the country

everything you embody is
backwards not right a threat
tenancy is not just for a house
it is an existence
‘why are you still here’
it carries me with it wherever i go
it follows
this specter
tenancy requires contract
requires ink requires
paper requires
dates
signatures constituted clauses
subclauses
living in a place requires proof that you belong
to that place and the subclauses prove your worthiness
to inhabit the space
this is not tenancy
this is inheritance
and you, landlord, settler, state
need to remember whose fucking land you’re on
whose house you encroach onto

you will be reminded
keep your signs claiming ‘STAY OUT’
hung on the door of a home
built by the hands of those you deny real
your subclauses mean nothing
in our courts
we operate on a different set of laws
threaded by a language beyond your reach
walled off shut out
is where i’d like to see you
walled off shut out
is there i’d like to put you
in your place
in the dark
with a copy of your contract

— i dream incessantly of the old gate
Its faded stone smooth with jagged bits
carved into the walls
soldiers lined up by the hundreds

i walk through the old market

filled with its vendors
remembering the time my mother accidentally
knocked into a stall

hundreds of plastic cups clanging onto the ground
splaying out like an over enthusiastic tea time
from the entrance you turn left into a short narrow
corridor

[50 soldiers are positioned on the right shoulder of
the corridor in a ground-watchtower]
small shops crammed next to each other
winds right open to the sky
path expands
ceiling removed
two stone lanes rolling out from the mouth of the
opening
supporting on the perimeter

khaltos selling vegetables

and fruits the path continues
down cobbled slick
towards a fork
left side right side
[50 soldiers stand along the

Wall merging the two sides
Surveying as people walk down]

i choose left entering a new section of the market

i dream of them
the moment of eyes meeting
recognition awakening pupil

3teeni haweetik

chest tightens
stomach turns inward
eating itself

not everyone has documents some of us have memories.

Mohammed El-Kurd

Laugh

Atlanta taught me poems aren’t wood or brick. Poems won’t build a house. Atlanta taught me that people will still applaud the bullets puncturing them if they have the right rhythm. This taught me how to look. There are many ways of looking. Doubt is one of them. I learned that success is mathematical and in the past tense. Systems here are snake-like. Shiny scales. I learned how to turn a tub into a mattress. Atlanta taught me how to catch a train, how to miss a train, how to be a train. Atlanta taught me to postpone panic, command rooms. Taught me how to stuff my skull with peacocks. How to walk tall into an argument. Taught me that a dollar is three and a half shekels. That dollars smell amazing. Female rap is the highest form of poetry. White girls are the absolute best at shoplifting, for reasons Atlanta knows. I know shoplifting is gray. Atlanta showed me my first pig carriage in flames. I am learning how to pour gasoline on discourse. This city weds its martyrs, celebrates when they come home. Atlanta taught me that hallway-hellos are not the same as friendship. Jerusalem taught me resilience. Atlanta taught me a different kind. I can now bring the funeral to the podium and laugh. My grandmother taught me if we don’t laugh, we cry. Atlanta knew that.

Hind Shoufani

ID

Dubai /NYC, 2021

I do not want to conjure a child (I think?
As decades plummet, unaccounted
mitochondria flushed to drain), sucking
at a puckered purple, the cracked
tip, clutching the striated ooze, the doubled
cleft spillage of waist. I insist on unknowing the overfill
questions of the so-young, coming & coming
at the expense of edge shadows I demand
from the cut of steep night, the unblinking
triangles of a leg
sharp flung to delirious stars, to naked eyes, traps.

I do not want to seed an infant, either. I know this
in my linings— this fact in the apex of muscles
that cannot succumb to miracles.
I want all my placid swamps flat. Neck for the gnawing
abyss, for the transient allure of bombs
hunted through hips, in velvet & spit. Only the force
closing in, groan low snarl in the heave of water I alchemy—

this lava I ride so good. To be awake at the throb
of dawn, do with that iridescence what I will. Stagger
dim hallways in hum, bang shudder
a fucking ruckus. I shall not sleep on company schedules.
I do not wish to be shhhhh.

I do not want a plot until the end is dug, no soil
but if it must be at that one second,
then wrap me in razor willows at
sway, set forth the gale, keep roots weeping—
I do not have need for shade in the slow middle aging.
Look, the centers that gallop

are no palms for its canopy of slow, &
anyway, I do not care to pray to leaves just yet.
I do not crave fruits in the clavicle of the mountain, flies
burying ground as seasons rot in a hot flash,
& wire, the bees, & the fleas, & the ominous parade
of settler clouds I can’t count in the continental drift of just my luggage.
I have no current address. Neither aloft, nor beneath.
Please do not mail me homelands.

I do not want a bolted safe, filled gold, stuffed certificates,
littered in fake border stamps of passage
from the inked wrists of Arab men I loathe
—gates at the kitchens of my stranded loves—
those uniforms of yes sir, no sir, of course
sir— (I feel so sorry for)— no, no to slow-hulk iron
doors dragged wide to panic find
creaky identity permission slips
as the arrival of mortar says MARCH.

No also to heirlooms not slung
over the defeat retreat of my fast-arched back
that fades in distances on repeat, the way myriad
veins in your father’s fatigue dropped all
the photographs of children in the sea.

I do not want silver— maybe one fine
day I could bear its Damascene heft,
when knives dissipate, too, & then adorn my breast
but make it large
make it tainted age brushed metal shivering
in the scent of yasmine, traveled amulet of maternal
anchor. Opaque black grey matter still here;
protect captive wrists in the beds of skin I rent,
in the wanton spectacle
of my sleep. Give me instead
draped crackable beads cheap
of ivory, of stone, of wood
of fake prisms & clasps snap broken
lost in rusty drawers & shrugged at ease.

I don’t want a car, with its fixed frames,
that pin memory of parking code, looked for
noon after noon as questions rise in the hell
of undergrounds sizzling, as sediment rubble bags
laden our feet, scratching asphalt in the recoil, the run.
I do not want to drive, keeping eyelids flared
for signs, having to record the changing horizon
unable to drift into the temple of the temple
behind the forehead’s veneer. I do not steer,
ever, preferring to stare out, wrists shaking
to hold paper & some old truth. A girl is not a tree.

I do not want a cat, or a dog (I really want a big dog).
I don’t want to feed a fish or lizard. I once imagined
how much I would befriend a turtle,
who could perhaps smile under my feet for a hundred years of kin,
but now that life is cliffs, we need to hobble, quick.

I do not want a much-rifled map to any new city.
I do not want to be polite, not really.
I do not want to stand at attention, or cross my legs poked
shut by your verses. I do not want to still
my tongue, or bend hard to holy structures
in the rotten skies of those bleeding
in the name of.

I only want the exact quadrants of where it hurts
in your chest. I only want an Arab lover, perhaps
more. Perhaps less. The Mediterranean swelling
in his tongue, nimble on the rocks, adrift.
A suitcase that expands to all our laughter.
78 plants that can be thrust with warmth
at the neighbors when the next farewell clocks,
maybe trashed into mulch without a choke in the heart of the throat.

I only want to lose keys & switch beds by the month.
I only want to be kept alone

to my hands, gathering the words that are needed for the day.
I only want quiet, & a ticket, the gliding insouciance
of birds heralding my hardened boots
firm on gravel untold, thighs terra wide for
a vehicle of bones I trust, still a skeleton

in flight above the stares of strangers
who do not spell my curves right.

I only want the knowledge that you bear
children like us to ascend the branches, their saliva
the juice of cactus from a century far. Our valley
carved into their intestines, as they jump.
I want to auntie everyone.
And for the moon to stay in her place.
To challenge time's malevolence, & get up. To fling
windows & quiver in the ragged lips— jawline un-synced
by his. To open carry a gun
no one sees. To use it. To claim only
my body, & reside inside my mouth. I want
to devour what crashes. Note down
the dialogue of spirits who held.
Etch this labour into craft erupting
out of breath as gospel. Absorb the entirety of music, digested
in mandalas that gyrate the blossom's unfurl. Delta heat seeping
pore after pore. Tell it all. Enter jammed doorways, & pray
into pillows, wet. Occasionally, fame & glory.
To choose freedom at every fork of lung.
Sometimes, cash. Often, big bowls of soup.
For no one to have wondered where I stood on things.

So, yes, please
yes to a hand across the field
where our sorrow camps. To the revolution
of weeds. So, yes to your eyelashes, crescent
hills curved up to the dawn that lights
down the dream slope of your face.

To say nothing. To never have to say nothing.
And this, this too, is Palestinian.

REVOLUTION IS FEMININE

Rewa Zeinati

other wives and veils and villages

1.

i used to pray once/ when I was a child/ afraid of too much/ in school they warned about the flames and gave a color/ when I asked my mother/ what does a *mooslim* believe in/ her face lit up and we were in the kitchen then/ and she was standing near the stove fire/ taller/ stirring something/ unafraid

2.

when I introduced him to my mother she cried that she'd lost her daughter to the lead sky of other wives and veils and villages/ she took me to visit fortunetellers and told me to listen/ she waited for them to read the coffee grains at the bottom of my cup/ to tell me to stop / and while the steel-winged birds dropped bombs over a city/ i turned to darwish and read

3.

ala hatheheh el ard ma yastaheqo al hayat/ upon this earth what's worth living for/ the invader's fear of memories/ and the tyrant's fear of song/ the beginning of love/ the beginning of / the beginning

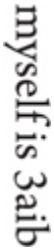
4.

my brother/ who never prayed/ begins to go to church on sundays/ lights a candle and buys incense and refuses the guest who rests his head against my chest/ my mother says marry for love or never / but forgets to explain the bruises/ and how her family was forced to leave that spring and how much she doesn’t remember/ we drink strong coffee on the balcony and I pretend that I do not smoke.

Hajer Mirwali

3aib

being a girl is white ash from the firepit on my black cardigan her black jeans our black hair except for xxxxxxx who has it dyed a light brown and xxxxxxx and xxxxxxx who wear hijabs we had to wash our bodies twice got past the chlorine and sunscreen to the layer of smoke finally it was time to eat we wondered should we put a cover over our bikinis would it be 3aib the 5aalas are right there what will they think (old Arabs always say what they think) finally our skin was showing whether it was 3aib or not 3aib to wear a tampon to buy a low-cut shirt to make eye contact to suck on a lollipop in the car when the windows aren't tinted anything above the knee is 3aib we squished four in the back seat 3aib sat on xxxxxxx's lap we listened to a song that hurts your ears but makes you feel like you're at the climax of a really good indie film xxxxxxx said I love dealing with teenage problems in my twenties xxxxxxx said I love to be fully inside



basically that's the gist we rolled 3aib up smoked it got so fucking 3aib holy 3aib it was 3aib everything is 3aib say it with me now everything

that makes you different from other girls is sitting with your legs open is not kissing all the 5aalas when you enter a room is shisha and dancing and slutty and embarrassing and laughing and armpit and guitar and transparency and desire and reproductive health and bras and red lipstick and not being sad enough and being sad 3aib cried in the car talking about her mom the rest of us cried hearing her crying is 3aib moving far away is 3aib getting married next summer is 3aib spending the whole night fixing the fire every twenty minutes the train goes by we wait for it to pass before we start again

xxxxxxx

and xxxxxxx and xxxxxxx

and

3aib

3aib 3aib

3aib

3aib xxxxxxx

xxxxxxx

xxxxxxx

3aib

3aib 3aib 3aib 3aib

3aib

and and and

and and and and

and and and and and

and 3aib

3aib

3aib 3aib

Aiya Sakr

and in the beginning, she stepped out of the grove

letters dropping from the first sky
like
maple seeds

the ba’ the nun the
ta’ catching on her
arm a tendril
    and spilling out
her kind
        bint
the word for girl and daughter
the word for plant
rearranged

the first girl taught us
after birth to twist spend our lives
apologizing to our mothers we rejoice
when birds inhale us
raise our waterskins to the sun

tell me about my birth my migration my
coming to this language not my language
in your samar did you cut buds out of
your bodies root me into the singing
earth

tell me later about my name
each letter carried
in the bowl of a different bird

Summer Awad

Belqassim’s Wives

in response to The Sheltering Sky *by Paul Bowles*

Sorry. Should I not scream?
I forgot to be your every Orientalist dream.
—from “Shades of Anger,” Rafeef Ziadeh

I. Marwa

Belqassim brought
a white girl home
again, serwal swallowing
her thin figure, hips
wanting meat
to fill them out; he thinks
he is clever. Her quiet,
her fingers, they are nothing
like a man’s, her
breasts beating
at the sash, threatening
to ruin his see-through
scheme. The girls
are still green,

think he’s taken
a prisoner indeed, wait
with bated breath
for his Sahraa stories.

II. Heba

I want
the lipstick paint me
like one of your french girls
you love so much
i will drown myself
in this perfume
to smell like wealth
and beauty
and power you found her
taḥt as-samaa’
‘ala at-ṭareeq you hoisted her
upon the back of the camel
how red do my lips have to be
how hairless my legs
for you to take me with you
to sail the sea of sand
i want to see as-sudan
too, to lie with you
min al-hilal ila al-badr
and back again

III. Rana

Bitch bit me.
Tourist. Bint il-kalb.

You look fucking
stupid in your Bedouin
getup, Aladdin-ass bitch.
Did you think you'd find
yourself out here
in this dry heat?
You, your ilk, and your postwar
wanderings, never saw
a bullet, still clutching
a made-up hole
in your heart, please,
khalaṣ, bekeffi, shno hay
ad-drama? Is this for a film
project? An acting seminar?
Will playing concubine
propel you to stardom?
Keep the bangles. Fuck
my husband, let the light
into your cell. Have some
tea, ḥabibti. We are known
for our hospitality, after all.
Ad-dar darik.

Mandy Shunnarah

if jesus was fat

they wouldn’t’ve been able to hoist him up on that cross / all the paintings got his ribs showing / the contours of his stomach undulating from emptiness / a growl heard through centuries of canvas / enough to make you hungry just looking at him / if he’d had meat on his bones / ate good like mama mary wanted him to / he would’ve been better off / might’ve pulled that cross right down / popped that flimsy piece of lumber from the ground & said / *i am thy god*

imagine dying on an empty stomach / could’ve been like buddha but chose to be a vacuum, a chasm instead / then have the nerve to make a rule about gluttony when there’s nothing about the sin of denying your own body / like it doesn’t carry you through this world / like it isn’t the one thing with you all your days / the one thing they cannot separate away / how am i supposed to believe this skinny bitch can do anything / how can he save me when he can’t even save himself

Jessica Abughattas

Litany for My Father

Because curfews of
Because strip search at the checkpoint into
Because grandmother’s undergarments splayed on
Because two men with guns on the way to
Because grandmother saves plastic Coke liters to
Because the water could without notice be
Because my father learned to drive a tractor at age
Because four families live in one stone
Because quartz bricks from my grandfather’s
Because after grandfather is buried, dad
Because dad didn’t cry, he buried his face in his hands &
Because the cancer couldn’t be
Because home is too far for the scent of
Because rosary beads hang from
Because my grandfather made a living carving crosses out of
Because my hands ache to make something of
Because my hands are raw from grasping my grandmother’s
Because I pried the lid off with my
Because checking the oven fourteen times every
Because sorry dad I’m sorry I
Because penance is for
& upturned shoes means you’re stepping on God

Rema Ghassan Shbaita

Of Being Laid Bare

... it is a blessing to know someone wants a /funeral for you
—Hanif Abdurraqib

I had a dream where two boys were destined
rivals tasked with murder.
There is an unfinished story &

the sun is milky over their backs
where jujubes are shared in bounty, split down the center
to check for worms because they don’t want to spoil

this afternoon with discolored flesh yet:
The same hands that press into thighs,
in muscle, belong to the teeth of the body

bared & gritted. They prefer
no weapon. Only the orchestrated palm against
palm against chest that asks—

How easy is it
to hold a blade

against my neck?

—A maimed accusation twisting
skin underhand. Familiar flesh
is easier to bruise

They know that if their skin isn’t purple mottled today,
it will be tomorrow & everyone knows this too.
Everyone knows they die by & live for each other,

would kill & be killed
grateful for any opportunity to touch
under the familiarity of execution

Those two boys will pick up their weapons,
be spectacled, know how to end the fight quick
but they will draw
it out
to make a mistake
& admit the ferocity of their tenderness,
before too much blood has been shed
& the only thing left will be me,
knowing that in my dream
they had pledged that even in another life, they would choose
each other to be their executioners.

Noor Hindi

This Rubble Is Mine

In the quiet of the morning I disassemble all my hearts.
Let out a sob so loud an entire year shakes out of me.

I have not forgiven you. In the January cold,
my arms drape around your hips.

When the music stops, I exit the dance floor,
your promises dripping down my back like sweat.

We halo around each other. Spin like thunder. But you are not
a God. Not the light

the sunflower of my body turns toward. I once prayed to the moon,
bid adieu to the yellow I whispered my wishes to. God said:

You pray for the wrong future. My friend said:
Don’t eat your heart out. The government said:

Let the borders of your lover’s body become your country
because we’re stealing yours.

I can hear my insides again. I once pressed my body so close to yours
our interiors wept. At a protest, I mourned Palestine, you.

How dare you knife an entire country
with my grief? How dare you wrap a keffiyeh

around your neck while strangling mine?
Dear lover: This rubble is mine.

If I pick up a stone it’s because I like to hold my misery
close. If I tell you I will not forgive you

it’s because you were once a land I planted peach trees
within. If I admit I love you

behind the quiver of a shut door, it’s because my ancestors
taught me how to build nations

in the aftermath of exile. Dear beloved: On your day of reckoning,
show Him your hands.

Everything they’ve ever held.
Everything they’ve ever let go.

Janine Mogannam

Dead Sea Existential

I lick my lips upon arrival, thieve salt
as souvenir, gorge on sea air
to slow the churn of my stomach,
aching to be seen as bint al balad.

The tour bus that delivered us to this shore
gives me away. My sweat-slick face burns
in shame. My cousins won’t let me seethe,
beg me to strip down to my bathing suit

and float, weightless, like them.
I arabesque excuses (my period, my hair),
watch as the water upholds my family.
Her sea-mouth sings, awaiting, and I drown

in self-denial, anger lashing at my skin,
rubbing salt into generations-
old wounds. I fear the plunge
would prove I am nothing more

than tourist, a watered-down version

of someone I’m supposed to be.
I refuse to become postcard,
a snapshot of grinning complicity—

I yearn to belong here, mirror-woman
returning to the brine of birth, bathing as my ancestors did,
nourished by the miracle of mud and mineral.
No tour bus. No American accent.

But where else but here? Like the sea I am endangered species,
the Palestinian in Palestine: never mind

that I’ve been made absentee
by the fortune of history. I present myself,

seeking entry without interrogation.
I am a daughter of this land,
no matter where the white hand of displacement
has forced me. I remove my sandals,

my long skirt, the embroidered blouse that smells
of my grandmother’s cooking. My cousins’ laughter
beckons me, their shared joy becoming mine,
echoing into the depths of the sea,
all of it our birthright.
And I swim.

A. D. Lauren-Abunassar

Aphantasia

storm clouds farm the distant field—
is it too late to write about Ophelia?
If I have the look of a desperately drowned
girl? Everywhere people say *good morning*
before the morning has happened. Everywhere
lightbulbs are burning out before they should.
Today: the sky is not allowed. Rain can happen.
Hands cannot happen. I lift and unlift the lock.
I try to surprise the neighbors with activity. See:
here she is. Alive. Shocked by attention, I cut
the soles of my feet running to bed. My father:
in the distant field. I see him from the window
looking for the tent that blew away.
He has equally blown some great distance.
To him, there is no such thing as thunder. To me,
it's the thing that lives in the jittery birds. I,
a jittery bird. I count to eleven and feel overwhelmed.
My father is stooping low in the earth like a dream. He couldn't
tell you, now, what home looks like. How did he
get here? So far away. How does he know
this is right? I count to twelve and he disappears. He happens
only sometimes. So far from my wind-heaved stoop.

Consciousness is full of want. Sleep full of want that feels
possible. Maybe the reason my father sleeps through
parties, films, the occasional lapsing car ride. So he can stumble
upon the possible. Today I woke up feeling
like an already said thing. Feeling the cleric howling. My
father: still sleeping. The sky: doomed to happen. The storm
unveils intention & some water falls down. I know this only
by sound: my head most comfortably burrowed.
This sound should be a dream, I think. My father
should be at home in his newly hemmed nightshirt.
Sleep invites the promise that something can be better left unkept. Love, I pray, is not allowed to sleep.

Annemarie Jacir

landscape

the trees
have been entered into a war

unregistered
civilians resisting
not with hands
with roots

lemon, orange
pine
almond
olive

trees recalling stories from acca

decades ago, they were younger
storms blew from the coast
the fate of the jaffa groves will be yours

they wondered if they'd have the same end

wind carried stories
    of stolen trees
    slain in stone and birth
    exploited and now growing
in a tel aviv shopping mall

war is feminine
revolution is feminine
dangling suffix
fruit hanging bitter

flags change
languages change
lovers carving names
sucking citrus

and trees

    the trees have changed

war heroes

lonely like men
resistant as women

Olivia Elias

Light

I was reading *Horses, still the light is innocent*
and repeated *Horses, still the light is fatal*

odd thing
light can kill
    &
  doesn’t last

love too

is love fatal
because it doesn’t last
or is it
the other way around?

and light?

draw up a list of
  everything
that can kill
  &
doesn’t last . . .

Zaina Alsous

Violence

We know the Nazis loved
America; Hitler yearned to paint a twin,

a green room where the dead are everywhere.
Asked Abraham before the flame, to the obedient tribe

What are these statues you cling to?
Why calico, why Spanish moss, why the crickets scream.

In a segregated graveyard, no stone reads
private or *public;* the local jail is everywhere.

Before another body is buried, a window is broken.
A window was broken. The window is broken.

In a high school history class, white children raised
their eyebrows when I raised my voice.

I don’t know what they thought I was capable of;
I wish I was more capable of it.

HOW I KILL SOLDIERS

Jehan Bseiso

Prayer

God of tulips,
God of lost children,
God of prisoners and patients,
God of Zaatar.
God of Dar and homeland,
God of viruses and vaccines,
God of the first hour before they all wake up,
God of the last hour before we sleep.

When the sky is on fire. Hold us.
When the house is demolished. Hold us.
When the hospital is hit. Hold us.
When the lynch mob is on the streets. Hold us.
When the boot is on the neck. Hold us.
When the headlines forget. Find us.

Name us.

Dareen Tatour

Women’s Chant

translated from the Arabic by Thiri Daoud

نَشيدُ النِّساءِ

اِنْهَضي مِنْ كُلِّ حَدْبٍ وَٱنْسِفي كَبْتَ ٱلقُيودْ

اَعْلِني روحَ التَّحَدِّي وَٱعْزِفي لَحْنَ الصُّمودْ

وَلِباسَ الصَّمْتِ قُدِّي مَزِّقي حَتَّى يَبيدْ

أَنْتِ لِلدُّنْيا ضِياءٌ اَشْعِلي عَتْمَ اللُّحودْ

حَطِّمي السِّجْنَ وَقومي حَرِّكي ٱلبَحْرَ الرَّكودْ

لَنْ يَظَلَّ ٱلحَقُّ فينا ساكِنًا حَدَّ ٱلجُمودْ

لا تَخافي حَرْبَ طاغٍ أَنْتِ نِبْراسُ ٱلوُجودْ

اِرْفَعي ٱلأَغْلالَ هَيَّا اَفْرِغي تِلْكَ السُّدودْ

حَرِّري قَيْدَ لِسانٍ وَٱنْزِعي صَمْتًا مَقودْ

لا يُعَدُّ ٱلحَقُّ جُرْمًا لا وَلا هَدْمَ ٱلحُدودْ

إِنَّما جُرْمٌ وَعارٌ أَنْ تَعيشي اللَّا وُجودْ

يا ٱبْنَةَ ٱلكَوْنِ ٱلجَميلِ جَدِّدي أَحْلى ٱلعُهودْ

اِرْفَعي لِلْعَدْلِ صَوْتًا وَلْتَهُبِّي كَالرُّعودْ

وَلْتَكوني لِلشُّعوبِ دَرْسَ تَنْفيذِ ٱلوُعودْ

Women’s Chant

From far and wide arise
Shatter the repression of chains
Declare the spirit of defiance
Rip off the clothing of silences
And play the tune of persistence
Tear it off until it perishes
You are the light of our lives
So light up the darkness of graves
Destroy the prison and rise
Stir the stillness of the seas
Within us, our rights
Shall not remain dormant to the extent of stoniness
Don’t you fear the war of tyrannies
For you are the lamp that shines for / the light of the existence
Hurry up! Throw off the shackles
And empty those dams
Liberate the withheld words
Unleash the hinged silences
It’s not a crime to have rights
Nor destroying borders is
‘Tis but offence and disgrace
For you to live the non-existence
You, the daughter of the beautiful universe
Renew the sweetest promises and pledges
Let it speak up, the justice

And burst into blazes as thunderstorms
For all the peoples
You shall be a lesson of fulfilling promises

Lisa Suhair Majaj

Do You See Them?

The fifth gate of grief is... "ancestral grief"
—Francis Weller

After all these decades of arguing,
it comes down to the same damn thing.
People want to go home. They want
to have the fabric of history include
them too, in warp and weft. They want

the devastation of exile undone; to exist
on the land, not just in history books.
To exist, not disappear. Don't tell me
you don't see them. They're right here
in front of you, their history as real

as yours. Look, here's my grandmother
leaving Jaffa at age 15, riding three days
on a white horse to her Birzeit wedding.
It's 1905, so astonishingly long ago
you suddenly realize that history

is like magic: it happens when you aren't
looking, leaves you gaping at the outcome.
Here's my aunt Mary, killed by an Irgun
terrorist at a Jerusalem bus stop, rushing
to get home to her babies. It's January 1948.

The bomb explodes; my uncle holds her
as she dies. "Something is falling inside me,"
she whispers. Then it falls. Now it's April
1948. Here are my grandmother's Jaffa neighbors

pushed into the sea, Jewish troops shooting

over their heads. A young man carries
a portly older man on his shoulders,
wades thigh deep into the salty waves
as others balance trunks precariously
on their backs amid panicking refugees.

Here's my grandmother's family
in Amman, struggling for the stuff of life
in exile: a loaf of bread, a bowl of lentil soup.
Here's their neighbor, remembering
the Jaffa of his youth. He still wants

to go home; says he hasn't lost hope,
and never will, even when he's dead
and buried. Soon he will be,
like my elderly aunt—she had the permit,
they could take her back when she died,

but her body was tossed from the coffin
at the border, searched roughly for contraband.

She made it across for burial, but the desecration
has not been laid to rest. Here’s my uncle
with his motherless children in Amman,

listening to the news. It’s 1967. The rest
of Jerusalem has been taken. Now
they’ll never go home again. Here’s my father,
longing to be laid to rest in his homeland:
Palestine at last. Instead, his body lies

in silty Iowa loam, as far from home
as the spinning globe could take him.
It’s 2020 now. Everyone’s old,
or dead. My cousins’ skin is translucent
with age. Palestine floats like a mirage

beyond the river, the bridge we call simply
The Bridge, beyond which Jerusalem
beckons. They want to go back to die,
or at least to be buried. But the closest
they can get is the story of their mother

in Jerusalem, something falling in her
as she died. Did my grandmother know
when she got on that white bridal horse
that she wouldn’t go home again? I remember
her silver bun, her stern, loving profile.

Widowed with three kids, my father
just a baby, she figured out how to survive.
It was the thing she had to do, so she did it.
But after all those decades it still comes down
to the same damn thing. Do you see us?

Refaat Alareer

Over the Wall

“There,” points Grandma.
She had a tent that was a house.
She had a goat and a camel.
She had a rake and a fork and a trowel.
She had a machete and a watering can.
She had a grove and two hundred plants.
She had a child and another one and another one.

***

“There,” she insists.
I could not see
Because of the wall.
I could not hear
Because of the noise.
I could not smell
Because of the gunpowder.

***

But I can always tell,
I am sure of Grandma

Who always was
And is still
And will always be.
She smells like soil.
And smiles like soil.
And blinks like soil
When touched by rain.

***

She has a house that is a tent
She has a key
And a memory.
She has hope
And two hundred offspring

***

Grandma is here
But lives there
“Over there!”

Lena Khalaf Tuffaha

Variations on a Last Chance

for those on the great march of return

The fence does not hold.
The wire sheds its barbs, softens to silk thread.
The snipers run out of bullets.
The desert, as it always has, of its own volition, blooms.
The snipers are distracted, sexting their girlfriends.
The snipers' eyes are blinded by smoke from our burning tires.
The snipers wonder if they will ever see the end of us.
The fence does not hold.
The snipers take a lunch break.
The bullets melt in their chambers
The bullets disintegrate when they reach the word PRESS on Yasser's vest.
The news finally breaks the stillness around us.
The bullets will themselves away from the boy's skull.
The boy's sandals sprout wings and he hovers above the bullets' path.
The snipers do not shoot at the medics evacuating the wounded.
The snipers make eye contact with one of us and see.
There are enough saline bags at the hospital.
The snipers shoot and miss and miss and miss.
We outrun the snipers.

We bury the dead at the fence, let their roots bloom on the other side of home.

Hasib Hourani

Untitled

i see a photo of a great heron eating a rat head-first. it’s nine in the morning
a film of mucus doming my fried egg and i feel sick like i am going to
vomit. now it is on my tongue now it is caught between molars chewing
swallowing swallow sinking into gut pit.

dirty water of the aqueduct
near my house it collects the downpour
        it walks me down
the citylink
    funnelling downward downhill
waterlog the cement throat
vomit into the stream

eat a date
keep the stone
put it in your pocket

in the olden days the arab sailors were the only sailors who did not contract
scurvy while at sea they were still getting vitamin c from the dates they
packed. i do not fact check this because i trust my dad.*
if you are on your deathbed lying on the sand, plant a date before your last
breath and you will go straight to heaven*. i do not fact check this because

my teacher scares me.

١* anas ibn malik reports that rasool allah pbuh said, *even if the resurrection were established upon one of you while he has in his hand a sapling, let him plant it.†*

وَأَرْسَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ طَيْرًا اَبَابِيلَ

and	he	delivers	unto	them	birds	in	flocks
	god	issues	to		aves		droves
		orders	onto				masses
		dispatches	upon				clusters

تَرْمِيهِم بِحِجَارَةٍ مِّن سِجِّيلٍ

throwing	at	them	stones	of	clay
casting			rocks	from	
launching					
shooting					
flinging					
slinging					

i am walking down the street and there is a rock on
the pavement and look another one. the first city i see when
i see palestine is jericho. we are driving down a flat wide
road in a straight line, boulders and hollows on either side
and i'm thinking *yes i made it* and then *yes i get it now* because it
is about the earth. it has always been about the earth.

1. did you have a rock in your pocket?
    1. yes
        1. did you throw it?
            ١. yes
                ا. with the intent to seriously harm?
                - yes
                    - twenty years away
                - no
                    - ten years away
            ٢. no
    b. no

god created the earth and said *gibril go plant these stones all over it* and gibril took them and because we live on a sphere the rocks spread like butter: evenly, melting. and then gibril tripped on the taut string border into palestine and his bag of rocks spilled and now our country is a monument of stones, and a garden of stones, and a reminder of *do not fall over.* a reminder of *when you are fleeing watch your feet.*

eat a date
keep the stone
in your pocket: the weight of the afterlife
of ammunition

a rock isn’t a rock

until it is thrown

and then it is a weapon

and then you are put into a box

what a throat
on that waterbird
to eat a rat whole

---

* jeanine reads my manuscript in draft form and highlights the word “dad” and comments “pretty sure i told him that story”

† Musnad Ahmad, *Hadith*

Micaela Kaibni Raen

Silence on Fire (Queer Tatreez]

whispering, a basket on the table by the open window
holding within it
a motif of resistance
a sacred rumination of the feminine
rolled into pieces of fabric, tall scrolls half-stitched
pierced by golden tapestry needles
lying beside balls of dyed thread
the embroiderer listening
to her grandmother speak softly, praying into the wind

*

Sumud

standing in a bright wind, demanding human rights, knowing I am haram / my life, a messy critique of unflappable homophobic – globality / while ancestral voices whisper about wave-salted seas/ reminding me of guilt—for leaving—for living / the continuing-on is what hurts / I have an angel on my shoulder not subject to enforcement / my pride is a spirit in drag, wearing embroidered dress / a handmade thoob by my grandmothers / she is free, she is Queerness / solidarity, strikes, sanctions, and protest / she is a combining into flesh and blood, a body burned alive by silence on fire / my wish: to boycott stateless auto-ethnography,

a transnational Queer agenda + symbolic nationalism = the arithmetic of Occupied same-ness

Palestinian + Queer voice = my identities calculating a feminine cypher

computing denouncement, a rejection of / not a weaving into/
the map of the homosexual sphere

I am lost

*

stitching columns and rows from the center out
she knows the secret to stitch and skip
pulling thread through fingers, measure to length of arm
guiding the needle up and in, the longitude and latitude of Palestine, repeating
her hair waving in the wind behind her
sacred shells from Gaza shine down to the ends, ornate
her pattern ancient and futuristic, a prophecy
existing in a bridge between time and its passing
each movement a vibration of surrender
an acceptance of what is, a rebellion
lining every stitch, holding together the heart of her people

*

Tatreez

a feminine calligraphy, a political praxis / Diaspora / a capturing of what was and the geography of what is / a chart of my spirit's exhalation, an effigy unknown / / a captivity / / a never-ending wave crashing upon the sands of heteronormativity /

my life is Queer *Tatreez* / weaving together what is available / sometimes only breath / Queerness / an elite west-centric label, boxing me in / homonationalism, a presumption of knowing / a wave of polarized representation / overloaded with, buckling under the heaviness of/ shouting expletives against . . . not thanking for . . . / zionist presumptions threatening violence at my very inclusion into . . . / my existence incites violence, a realization of / anthro-political entropy / this is the birthing of the radical ethno-Queer / a movement dancing in the shadows, but not a shadow itself, no / more like fabulosity as ideology / the creation of a phenomenon in neon, the upside of light / its shine, an eternity of freedom in every kiss / ownership of / or control over a womb / my womb: the epicenter of glitter / bright colors exploding with every touch of hand, to shout, to stain / Queerness / weaving into the ancient ways of women / DNA's inherent song, a slow humming vibration in the background, underground / the underpinning of true liberation

*

unwinding, with the pull of thread, she begins again, another row and another
knowing one day she will dye her own thread and the tapestry will be
solely hers to create, to own, to complete
the half-finished rolls of fabric tower above the braided edges of her basket
rising as if to be the columns of an ancient tomb, bearers of yesterday's tomorrows
she smiles thinking maybe they are perfect just the way they are
every stitch essential to the pattern's story
they are a bringing together of many things
then carefully with her needle... she buries the tail
of thread underneath the previous stitch
just as she has all along

*

today's news is old news / cisgender settlers . . . imperial alliances . . . capitalist technocracy . . . / Palestine outside of Palestine / not a Diasporic mirror, but a spiral scrolling back and into / a light polished by pressure, ready

to push itself up through / crooked cracks in the road, through bombed craters, ancient tunnels, and underground wells / a restive eruption, an erupting into being . . .

Palestinian and lesbian
mother and dyke
activist and wife
poet and target
being . . .
Arab and Queer
is like having an
Intifada
every day.

Rimona Afana

nar

you ain’t gotta slit wrists to taste
the pomegranate juice running through those veins
anthocyanins, ellagitannins may stain space and time
thyme covers still enslaved hills
mills to pulverize futures, pills to erase pasts
they asked about the chain of pomegranate beads
keeping me tied to an address i was uprooted from
it’s not beads or seeds, they’re arils
aprils, when lightning strikes as you open the door or
augusts, when notices of eviction are issued or
novembers, when settlements for unsettlement get notarized
as wooden snakes molt in suburban atlanta or
mays, when 800,000 lives got fissured and 13 million descendants
all still sob in midtown haawiyah
displacement can turn oddly cyclical
because postmemory
because intergenerational trauma
because blood memory
because continuous traumatic stress
because kismet
because other shit your therapist can monetize
some call it al-nar, the blaze, though nar means pomegranate too

in the tongue of one of our ex-occupiers
but without the vowels, now, rmn is just the same
for us and them
if only words buried swords
the land we’re on would turn
scalding pitch to take all of us under
you’d then know i am the pomegranate juice which stains
worse than the blood in the wrists that
never got slit

Laila Shikaki

22 years in, 5 days out

dedicated to the freed and then re-captured Palestinian prisoner, Mohammad al-Ardah

22 years inside an Israeli prison
digging his way out with a spoon
eating olives, raw, for it was the month of September
tasting cacti fruit

and I, sitting in a house comfortably
wonder if the thorn hurt
his hands more
than his return to prison.

his lawyer
whom he met days after torture
said he cried hearing small “
details.” details of freedom, details of walking in lands
Mohammad al-Ardah has never been in.

And I, writing comfortably, wonder how do you
greet the sun and the moon after 22 years?
how do you walk in lands your ancestors

walked on
near trees they watered
touching fruits they grew
that no longer belong to you?

imprisoned for 22 years
digging for 9 months
tasted freedom for 5 days
tortured for many days and hours.

Mohmmad al-Ardah

his lawyer
breathed heavily
as he narrated Mohammad’s story
after midnight.
he smiled as he said
Mohammad promised me he will
write
about these 5 days

and I, sitting comfortably
promise to write as well
about the orchards, the olive trees
and the taste of freedom-infused cacti

Mahmoud Darwish

The Eternity of the Cactus

translated from the Arabic by Jeffrey Sacks

—Where are you taking me, father?
—Where the wind takes us, my son . . .

As the two were leaving the plain where. . .
Bonaparte's soldiers surveyed
the shadows on the old wall of Acre—
a father said to his son: Don't be afraid. Don't
be afraid of the drone of bullets! Stay close
to the ground so you'll survive! We'll survive and climb
a mountain in the north and return when
the soldiers return to their distant families

—Who will live in the house after us, father?
—It will remain as it is, as it has always been, my son!

He felt for his key the way he would feel for
his limbs and was reassured. He said
as they climbed through a fence of thorns:
Remember, my son, here the British crucified
your father on the thorns of a cactus for two nights

and he didn’t confess. You will grow up,
my son, and tell those who inherit their guns
the story of the blood upon the iron . . .

—Why did you leave the horse alone?
—To keep the house company, my son
Houses die when their inhabitants are gone. . .

—Why did you leave the horse alone?
—To keep the house company, my son
Houses die when their inhabitants are gone. . .

says to his son: Be strong like your grandfather!
Climb with me the last hill of oaks,
my son, and remember! Here the janissary fell
from the mule of war. So be steadfast with me
and we’ll return

—When, father?
—Tomorrow. Perhaps in two days, my son!

A reckless tomorrow chewed at the wind
behind them through the long nights of winter
The soldiers of Yeshua ben Nun built
their citadel from the stones of their house. Out of breath
on the path to Qana: Here
Jesus passed one day. Here
he turned water into wine and said
many things about love. My son, remember
tomorrow. Remember crusader citadels
gnawed at by April weeds after

the soldiers’ departure. . .

Naomi Shihab Nye

Separation Wall

When the milk is sour,
it separates.

The next time you stop speaking,
ask yourself why you were born.

They say they are scared of us.
The nuclear bomb is scared of the cucumber.

When my mother asks me to slice cucumbers,
I feel like a normal person with fantastic dilemmas:

Do I make rounds or sticks? Shall I trim the seeds?
I ask my grandmother if there was ever a time

she felt like a normal person every day,
not in danger, and she thinks for as long

as it takes a sun to set and says, Yes.
I always feel like a normal person.

They just don’t see me as one.
We would like the babies not to find out about

the failures waiting for them. I would like
them to believe on the other side of the wall

is a circus that just hasn’t opened yet. Our friends,
learning how to juggle, to walk on tall poles.

Nadia Said

Do you think God ever puts on a hat and fleece lined coat,

pays the five dollar fee to reserve his 25 minutes
drives through miles and miles
of back country roads
where the county jail stays tucked and folded away
sits in front of a two-way plexiglass window
four inches thick
and starts speaking in a slow and gentle voice?
Do you think He ever does that?
I like to think
God
in between answering the prayers that light up his phone
after leaving his weekly meetings to grab lunch with Muhammad
and Jesus, carves out thirty minutes of his day
to pay my brother a visit.
My brother, who took a job in the commissary hoping his sentence would pass faster,
who stole a 99 cent bar of soap he saw lying in the trash
so he could wash himself of his sins,
but paid with 180 more days instead
My brother, who recites *dua* and *ruqya* for every occasion,

who sleeps with the *Fatiha* tucked near his heart.
I like to believe God visits my brother every day.

They sit
and laugh
and cry and talk.
And when He hears the five minutes left warning,
God sits forward,
voice desperate and urgent,
and reminds my brother he loves him
in the time they have left.

Samih Al-Qasim

End of a Talk with a Jailer

translated from the Arabic by Nazih Kassis

خاتمةُ النقاشِ مع سَجّان
*
مِن كُوةِ زِنْزانتي الصُّغرى
أُبْصِرُ أَشْجارًا تبْتَسِمُ لي
وَسُطوحًا يملأُها أهْلي
ونَوافذَ تبْكي وتُصَلّي
مِن أَجْلي
مِن كُوَّةِ زِنْزانتي الصُّغرى
أُبصِرُ زِنْزَانَتِكَ الكُبْرى!

From the narrow window of my small cell,
I see trees that are smiling at me
and rooftops crowded with my family.
And windows weeping and praying for me.
From the narrow window of my small cell—
I can see your big cell!

Sarona Abuaker

My Mother’s Third Imprisonment

Conceive this moment
come to understand it(’)s history

soldiers shove a tray of olives
        under the door
she carves
        holes into the pits
                using a nail finds
                        a string
                                makes a bracelet.
Resistance sometimes looks like constraint.
Her cell lined with used tea bags
                                strung up drying
waiting for reuse throughout the weeks.

The soldiers do not come around.

Ahlam Bsharat

How I Kill Soldiers

translated from the Arabic by Fady Joudah

Colonial soldiers,
what have they been doing
to my poetry all these years
when I could have easily killed them
in my poems
as they've killed my family
outside poetry?

Poetry was my chance
to settle the score with killers,
but I let them age outdoors,
and I want them to know decay
in their lives, their faces to wrinkle,
their smiles to thin out,
and their weapons to hunch over.

So if you, dear readers, see a soldier
taking a stroll in my poem,
trust that I have left him to his fate

as I leave a criminal
to his many remaining years,
they will execute him.

And his ears will execute him
as he listens to me reciting my poem
to grieving families,
he won’t be able to slink out
of my book or the reading hall
as the seated audience stares at him.

You will not be consoled,
soldier, you will not,
not even as you exit
my poetry event
with slumped shoulders
and pockets full of dead bullets.

Even if your hand,
tremulous as it is
from so much murder,
fidgeted with the bullets,
you will not
produce more
than a dead sound.

—Ramallah

Fadia M. Antabli

A Letter to My Killer

translated from the Arabic by the author for the soul of Shireen Abu Aqleh

رسالة إلى قاتلي

فلسطينية أنا
اسميَ في الأعالي استقر

دمي روى تراب الأرض
ولن يضيع هدر

فلسطينية أنا
رغم كيد الأعادي

روحي طافت في شوارع القدس
على أكف الأيادي

فيا أيها الجبناء
يا من أخافكم صوتي

فأصدرتم قرار اغتيالي
أعلموا أنما أنكم قد كتبتم خلودي

عندما أنهيتم حياتي
وأني عائدة، فانتظروني

شبحكم سأكون، لأحرمكم
نوم الليالي.

A Letter to My Killer

Palestinian I am
My name is settled high

My blood watered the land beneath my feet
And will not be squandered

Palestinian I am
Despite enemies' schemes

My soul roamed the streets of Jerusalem
Carried on the shoulders of my mourners

O you who cower at my voice,
You who ordered my throat to be cut,

Beware! When your bullet shook my skull,
Know that you've written my immortality.

Wait for me, I am returning
Your ghost I will be, to deprive

Your every night's sleep

Najwan Darwish

“Who Remembers the Armenians?”

translated from the Arabic by Kareem James Abu-Zeid

I remember them
and I ride the nightmare bus with them
each night
and my coffee, this morning
I’m drinking it with them

You, murderer—
Who remembers you?

J. D. Harlock

There Will Be No Funeral

There will be no funeral for the general
There will be no 21-gun salute
There will be no funeral for the general
There will be no burial flag

They say the hearse has broken down
They say the pallbearers have fallen sick

But no one came to the cemetery
And no one lit a candle at the vigil

They were all at the demonstration
They were all over the news
tearing the constitution in half
and burning down Beirut

The riot police showed them no mercy
They have never done before
Then the bikers arrived with weapons
We’ve seen it all before

This is not the first time this has happened
Nor will it be the last

But his widow cries on our television screens,
And his only son puts on a brave face

For there will be no funeral for the general
There will be no 21-gun salute
There will be no funeral for the general
There will be no burial flag

Refaat Alareer

If I Must Die

If I must die,
you must live
to tell my story,
to sell my things,
to buy a piece of cloth
and some strings,
(make it white with a long tail)
so that a child, somewhere in Gaza
while looking heaven in the eye
awaiting his dad who left in a blaze—
and bid no one farewell
not even to his flesh
not even to himself—
sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above
and thinks for a moment an angel is there
bringing back love.
If I must die,
let it bring hope;
If I must die,
let it be a tale.

Omar Zahzah

a poem joins the resistance

a poem has nothing to lose
a poem is the best shot
a poem smokes too many cigarettes
a poem looks directly at the sun
a poem breathes return
a poems births poet armies
a poem sweats defiance
a poem hijacks consciousness
a poem takes no prisoners
a poem frees the people
a poem won’t *take it easy*
a poem frees the land
a poem won’t *just a minute*
a poem eats apartheid walls
and shits on genocide’s finery
a poem is done with *dialogue*

A POEM HANGS IN BALANCE

Fargo Tbakhi

Craft Talk

The first image, a little girl’s body pulled out of the rubble,
I strike from the poem. Let her rest. Language is a failed state.

The second image my own body stripped and hung by my fingers,
less their nails, piled neatly on a nearby table, I keep.

The poem is a space to rehearse for the future.
The third image a dictum of power. Something like “the state is” or
“the Guggenheim-winning poet is”. This I soften and blur.
In my weakest moments I still succumb to the desire for a book deal
and avoid threatening its keepers.

The fourth image rubble alone, pulled from the mouth of my body
hanging from a hook in the black site. This image I widen so it envelops
the entire page. Yellow bile coating the margins.
I am interested in frightening you.
I do not want to be alone anymore.

The fifth image a drone giving birth to a child with gold leaf on
its fingernails. I wipe the mucus off. I give it a name. At the edge
of the poem the baby slouches towards Jerusalem. When it crosses

the border the poem can no longer see it. The drone-child becomes
an imagined condition the poem has released into the world.
I do not know what it intends. I do not know what it will eat.

The sixth image my father, dragged into the poem against his will
once more. I suspend him here with me. I revel in our
togetherness. His nails join mine, our backs are cut, our eyes plucked out.
The cruelty of jailers infected my language.
Everything I love I turn to cruelty. The poem now is just
another cell. All I know is how to write us dead.
Inside this image I reach out my little toe

and touch the image of my father's
little toe.
The state is
crueler
than your poem
ever could be,
I make the poem
make my father say.

Yasmeen El-Hasan

An Archive

Five settlements surround our town.

How ironic: they think themselves to be the sun
and yet they orbit us

Litter is unnatural to our land
and we are its caretakers

The severed roots tell me that we have not failed them:
but must our life be a scar?

The ancestors tell me that we have not failed them:
but must our death be a poem?

The fortune in my coffee grounds tells me: but what is there to do when we are all
but free

except archive these scars through poems?

Tarik Dobbs

For inside ‘48: How Does [redacted] Make You Feel?

after Monica Youn

I feel it every day. But I am lucky.

Do you visit it often?

No . . . 10 years ago, once.

How do you define it?

I don’t watch news.

Do your parents visit?

Yes, once a week.

What do you do?

Burn charcoal, smoke argileh.

What do you want?

To be a teacher.

What have you learned?

To [redacted]

Is there work?

Inshallah (no).

What are you worth?

My heart and my tongue.

Rasha Abdulhadi

Finished with the Peace

interrupting Seigfried Sassoon, 1917

—you can tell, can't you, hayk hatha, how the peace is the war they won. Pursuing peace has been the best excuse for making war. That peace of quelling, peace of graveyard, peace of the heaven of the carpetbombed and altar-bled, peace of the quiet they require. Peace of the weight of chains. Peace of the drowned. Peace of those by their own lives taken. Peace of total surrender. The peace of everything stolen and nothing left to fight for or defend. Peace of evicted homes. Peace of full prisons. Peace of 23 hours in solitary. Peace of checkpoints. Peace of total surveillance. The peace of no dissent or disagreement. Peace of no payment for the workers. Peace of empty farms. Peace of full slaughterhouses. Peace of blood on the slaughterhouse floor. Peace of the empty clip and empty canister. Peace of the tank's tread. Peace of the drone's hum. Peace of the hardshelled fist, of speed and progress, of a more perfect union with the end of the baton. Peace of the long road from the locked city to the village. Peace of the smooth surface of the long wall. Peace of the sniper's perch. Peace of disappearance, peace of kidnapping, peace of trussed and gagged and

no more the din of petition and protest, no more our jokes played, our banners planted on the back of police vans, our murals covering barricades, no more our dances against an audience of riot shields. No noise of the living, noise of the resisting, noise of children chasing each

other, no noise of old folks talking story. No noise of groceries delivered, medicines delivered, dinners delivered, of debts loudly cancelled and forgiven. No noise from the painters and poets and musicians, the puppetmakers and sculptors, no more our mics electrified and feasts spread. No more the insurgent sound of us tending each other, making repair, reclaiming houses, derailing train engines to run as generators, so—

Samah Fadil

prongs into the nation

it’s never enough to simply exist as
lands
between folds of skin
it’s funny how money
talks of god
& twists straight roads ahead

should you

have your rights

offered up as

fresh slabs
behind your back

now you are stuck
metal

humans
get involved
& folds of a bill
changes situations
spreads like virus
to fit lie into truth

write the plea
to save a nation

forbidden
by rule of law

a “solution”
that sticks out prongs
& stabs cement
right at your neck

between the cold

the wall built keeps you out

desert blooming
cleanses the soil
through destruction

love to

launch

pillage & forage
demand you
make amends &

thread the cosmos
sew the eye
build the shapes
forget to live &
through it all
walls may be built

[keeps you in]

through phosphorus gas
of its indigenous hosts
above all else
humans
always

boast

hundreds of warheads

then
atone
conjure a million
miracles

through a needle
the hem of freedom
of our nation’s dress
live to forget
truth laid bare
only to crumble once again

Ahmad Diab

UNRWA

UNRWA *n.* **1.** (originally **UNRWAPRNE**) United Nations Relief and Works Agency (*originally* for Palestine Refugees in the Near East). **2. An awkward acronym** coined | together with an a la mode neologism | to obsolete an ancient toponym. **3. The first English word** in the abecedery of an Arab refugee. **4. A Consolation prize** | for the losers | in the liberation Olympics. **5. An indemnity clause** | to shield the conqueror | from the dues of war. **6. A set of privileges |** immunities | exemptions and facilities | necessary for | indefinitely postponing return. **7. An incubator |** for desoiled roots | to grow | in salty solutions. **8. A spooful of fish oil |** to improve the symptoms of | statelessness. **9. A can of powdered milk** to nourish | the human matter | flowing in the alleyways. **10. A protracted camp |** to protect the city | from the lava seething | within the tents. **11. A bullet point** on the resumes of future diplomats. **12. A shooting range** for aspiring fascists. **13. A field for the work** of critical anthropologists. **14. An award opportunity** for brash photographers. **15. A bottle** to age refugee rage | until the subdued taste of exile. **16. A white registration card** | to shelter our names | from death | and birth | in neat tables and English spellings. **17. A school wall** | for pissing contests | for climbing over the syllabus | for drawing from memory | and for hiding first kisses. **18. A cyan morning salute** | to All the Peoples' flag | fluttering to the anthem | of our permanent effervescence. **19. A mast** to pin | the children's wings | to the board of makeshift history. **20. A free notebook** to journal |

on the annals | of collective decomposition. **21. A classroom** to receive | the inspector from Europe | checking on the world's | gift to us | and on the length of our nails. **22. Refugee teachers |** bought with hard currency | to teach | refugee students | grammar and gratitude | yes, we lost a country | but look we gained an agency.

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh

Anthropologists

I know some of them.
Some of them are friends but the majority are enemies.
Upon the doorstep you observe what they observe with a lot of care.
You look at them the way they look at you, curiously and obliquely.
You suddenly develop a fear of imitating them whilst they imitate you.
You worry about relapsing into one of your minds while sharing mundane details with them.
Sometimes I dream of devouring all of them, and just once with no witnesses or written testimonies.

All of us wanted to greet her.
Even my illiterate mother who never spoke a word of English said: Welcome!
After spending hours with us, in the same room, she left with a jar of homemade pickles and three full cassettes with our voices.

Layla Azmi Goushey

Anthology of Ethnological Shifts

I.
The Journal of Displacement
Calls for submission.

Al-Sheikh Muwanis village,
ethnically cleansed and partitioned.

II.
Palestinian aspirational limitation
resulting from mass incarceration.

III.
Department of research and dismemberment
at the hilltop crusader colonial experiment.

IV.
Et defecit universitas
democratia, in Palaestina, fractum
libertas, in Palaestina, fractum

V. Conclusion: Divestment Until Palestine Reinstatement.

Appendix

Survey of Palestine, 1945. Map Of Palestine. 1945.

Tel Aviv University was built on the destroyed Palestinian village of Al-Sheikh Muwanis.

Lina AlSharif

A Poem Hangs in Balance

As long as
        we stand

as soon as
        we return
until
        we are free
and when
        we *are* free,

this land will know peace
the poem will be complete.

Asmaa Azaizeh

Reflection

translated from the Arabic by Lena Khalaf Tuffaha

Yesterday, I handed all my poems to my publisher.
I feel like I handed him my head
and the words I speak from now on
will come out of his mouth.
What a disaster!

Disasters don’t show up one at a time.
They arrive in legions like a starving hoard.
A poet said this then died.
For example, half my family died
and after I celebrated the end of that year
my father died.

Since then I’ve let my poems go.
Every night poets get drunk beneath my window
and dictate wise poems to me.
I loathe wisdom.
I invite them in, slaughter them like fattened sheep
and dine on them,

but I still can’t get my voice back.
I glimpse it through the window, crucified
at the top of the mountain.

I’ve become a mere reflection
of a tree stripped naked in a puddle on the road.
Don’t step over me, shade me
from a sun that might pass overhead
and vaporize my trunk.
Maybe I will speak my peace.

I’ll tell you disasters might die out
if you stopped feeding them firewood,
but you won’t hear me,
and the mountain is made of kindling.

—Dabbouria, Lower
Galilee

Jaye Nasir

Good Night

1.

I was there in that time and place.
The house when the house
came down. At the shattered mouth
of history. Looking
into darkened windows.
Looking into the past
where my grandmother stood, alone
in her nightdress, waiting.

2.

Darkness falls like a set of hands.
Like a television set.
I don’t watch the news, but it watches me.
I don’t know about the rest of you,
but I did not arrive on this earth
just to perform myself.

3.

The moths laid eggs in the birdseed,
their larva wriggled out and now
when you pick up the bag it pulses
in your hand like a breathing organ.

4.

This book is an organ. This world
is a throat in the process
of swallowing. Throw stones
into your well. Into your own dark hollow.
Listen for a splash or a voice that says,
Ouch. That says, Is anybody out there?

5.

The only eternity I understand
is this one: feathery weight
of the moth thrashing
between my cupped palms.
You don’t have to say anything
to eternity. It already knows
how very sorry you are.

6.

Alas, this story has no moral,
like a dream or a real life.
If you are laughing: good.
If you are sobbing: good.
Do you mind if I spoil the ending?

We’ll spend this whole life searching
for a place to belong and at last
find it in the ground.

Sheikha Hlewa

Nakba

translated from the Arabic by Fady Joudah

My mother is three years younger than Nakba.
But she doesn’t believe in great powers.
Twice a day she brings God down from his throne
then reconciles with him
through the mediation of the best
recorded Quranic recitations.
And she can’t bear meek women.
She never once mentioned Nakba.
Had Nakba been her neighbor,
my mom would’ve shamelessly chided her:
“I’m sick of the clothes on my back.”
And had Nakba been her older sister,
she would’ve courted her with a dish
of khubaizeh, but if her sister whined
too much, my mom would tell her: “Enough.
You’re boring holes in my brain. Maybe
we shouldn’t visit for a while?”
And had Nakba been an old friend,
my mom would tolerate her idiocy

until she died, then imprison her in a young picture
up on the wall of the departed,
a kind of cleansing ritual before she'd sit to watch
dubbed Turkish soap operas.
And had Nakba been an elderly Jewish woman
that my mom had to care for on Sabbath,
my mom would teasingly tell her
in cute Hebrew: "You hussy,
you still got a feel for it, don't you?"
And had Nakba been younger than my mom,
she'd spit in her face and say:
"Rein in your kids, get'em inside,
you drifter."

—Haifa

Dareen Tatour

In the Camp

translated from the Arabic by Thiri Daoud

في ٱلـمُخَيَّمْ
قَصَّ طِفْلٌ مِنْ صَحيفَهْ
حَرْفَ أَوْجاعِ ٱلكَلامِ
صَرْخَةٌ لِلْجوعِ
تَرْوِي كُلَّ سيرَهْ
تَقْتُلُ ٱلأَحْلامَ
مِنْ لَيْلِ السَّلامْ

في ٱلـمُخَيَّمْ
مَرَّ طِفْلٌ بِـٱلحَقيبَهْ
بَيْنَ آثارِ الدَّمارِ
قَبلَ آذانِ ٱلـمَدارِسْ
يَصْلُبُ ٱلآلامَ حيرَهْ
كَيْ يُصَلِّي
في صُفوفِ ٱلـمَوْتِ رَكْعَهْ
تالِيًا آيَ ٱلحِصارِ

في ٱلـمُخَيَّمْ
قاتِلُ الطِفْلِ تَبَسَّمْ. . . !
شاهِدُ ٱلقَبْرِ تَيَمَّمْ. . . !
كاتِبُ ٱلحَرفِ تَأَلَّمْ
وَٱلـمُغَنِّي كَمْ تَمَنَّى
أَنْ يَكونَ الشِعْرُ
لِلطِفْلِ الطَّعامَ

In the Camp

In the camp,
A child, from a newspaper, cut
The edge of pain-inflicting words
For hunger, a scream
Which tells each and every story
And kills all dreams
During nights of peace.
In the camp, a child with a backpack passes
Through the remains the destruction has left behind
Right before the school summons for the child to enter,
Bewildered, the suffering, that child crucifies
So as to pray a “Rak’a”
Adding one to the death toll—
And the siege verses that the child recites.
In the camp, There, smiles the child’s killer
The tombstone with dust, itself, cleanses and purifies.
In pain is the writer.
Oh, how badly has wished the singer
That in poetry a child would find a bite

Suheir Hammad

Jabaliya

a woman wears a bell carries a light calls searches
through madness of deir yassin calls for rafah for bread
orange peel under nails blue glass under feet gathers
children in zeitoun sitting with dead mothers she unearths
tunnels and buries sun onto trauma a score and a day rings
a bell she is dizzy more than yesterday less than
tomorrow a zig zag back dawaiyma back humming suba

back shatilla back ramleh back jenin back il khalil back il quds
all of it all underground in ancestral chests she rings
a bell promising something she can't see faith is that
faith is this all over the land under the belly
of wind she perfumed the love of a burning sea

concentrating refugee camp
crescent targeted red

a girl's charred cold face dog eaten body
angels rounded into lock down shelled injured shock

weapons for advancing armies clearing forests sprayed onto a city

o sage tree human skin contact explosion these are our children

she chimes through nablus back yaffa back shot under
spotlight phosphorous murdered libeled public relations

public
relation

a bell fired in Jericho rings through blasted windows a woman
carries bones in bags under eyes disbelieving becoming
numb dumbed by numbers front and back gaza onto gaza

for gaza am sorry gaza am sorry she sings for the whole
powerless world her notes pitch perfect the bell a death toll

Ghayath Almadhoun

Black Milk

translated from the Arabic by Catherine Cobham

You emerge from behind the scenes, I emerge from behind the nightmares, smiling as if the war hasn't eaten my brother, and in those days, when my Syrian friends were dying under torture, my European friends were gently withdrawing from my wound which scratched their white lives and didn't conform in any way to accepted Western criteria of what constitutes pain.

In those days I used to whisper in your ear the things that a man whispers to a woman when he's eating her, and in the same space-time where you were sleeping calmly like a lake in the north of Sweden, the war was sitting on the edge of my bed as if it was my wife and the verses of the Quran that I was forced to learn by heart when the primary school teacher beat me were the only thing that helped me sleep. Oh God, the wolf has eaten a piece of my heart and the barrel bombs have destroyed my notebook. Oh God, the wolf has eaten me for real, not metaphorically, and the Mediterranean has drowned my water. I'm the one who used to "walk on this earth joyfully," as it says in the Quran, but they stole my friends and suicided them in Damascus and the glass of water that used to moisten my thirst was smashed. Poets have inherited my fingers, my friends have become memories, highwaymen on highways already blocked off, I mean

on highways between cities besieged by hunger and adrenalin, and in the same space-time where I enjoy a life of luxury in the far north of Europe in a country containing 97,500 lakes of sweet water, my mother tells me that she is thirsty and I remember the novel *The Outsider* . . . and try not to remember Albert Camus.

Smiling as if the war hasn't eaten my brother
I climb Mount Carmel like a vine trellis
To appear beside you in the family photo
And you stand beside me bitter as truth
And warm as a bullet

And long like Sunday.
A woman with a memory riddled with holes
Through which my heart leaks out in the shape of a butterfly
Whenever I think legal thoughts about her
My heart refuses to submit to Islamic law
And poetry refuses to obey me by repeating the outworn metaphors of classical poets
The bank refuses to give me a loan so that I can buy a horse
Warlords refuse to become peacelords
Children refuse to play with me as I walk through the neighborhood
Because their parents have warned them against strangers
I shan't teach my children to fear strangers
For I am one of them
I won't say to them don't talk to the strange man
For that man is me
I am the stranger who lost his hand in the war
The widower whose wife is not dead
The migrant who didn't drown in the Mediterranean
The believer who kissed you by the mosque wall
So the shaykh trembled in his prayers fearing the wrath of God

The refugee they searched
And whose memories they found hidden among cunning answers
I’m the one who loved you savagely
And kissed you without knowing the difference between your face and silence
Around your house I howl like a wounded wolf
And in your pitch-black night I light faint purple like a cigarette’s glow in the dark
Whenever I say your name my heart stutters
As if I’m being born once again from my mother’s womb
As if I’m touching your waist with my missing hand
Whenever I pass my tongue over your skin my poem stumbles
Whenever
But I touch your wellspring to moisten my heart that is cracked with dryness
Whenever
But I drink your voice that is moistened with water so that thirst does not kill me
But

My fingerprints that they found on your skin, your blood that wetted my right hand, the wolves that snap at my waist when I smell your voice, the green that trickles from your hand wounded by the rose, my tongue that pronounces your name in classical Aramaic, my crosswords inside you. How I would do my ablutions in wine before touching you, how the watchman caught me gathering the hornets’ honey dripping from your nipples, how my heart that was accustomed to eating women’s fingers became vegetarian in your presence. You are the Surah of the Poets, the essence of the women of the Middle East and North Africa. For your sake I re-write the rules of Arabic grammar making them conform to the measurements of your waist and I kill the dead metaphor once again.

I look in the mirror and see your face
The poem slips out of my hand
I hear the scent of a woman eating my fingers
The Mediterranean Sea drowns in the immigration department
The water grows thirsty
I remove your features from my face in order to recognise myself
And my notebook loses its memory
The official in the immigration department asks:
Where are you from?
I answer:
I don’t know for I’m not yet married
And he refuses my asylum application
And the United Nations refuses the color of my skin
And the international community refuses to look directly at my wound
At that moment when time becomes dark as Rembrandt’s paintings
And feeling becomes cold as the corpses of my friends
You emerge from behind the scenes
Just like that
Without introductions
Or explanations
Or a logical interpretation
And grant me asylum for sentimental reasons
How do you know the road to Damascus when you’ve never been down it?
How do you kill geography when the distance between us is made of metal
That expands with the heat
And shrinks when I kill my suitcase.

This world is falling from the seventh floor
And sparrows commit suicide so that time doesn’t precede them
Time that sits like a dull guest between us
And looks at you
Me and you and time make four

A man and a woman have never met
except when time was the fourth person in the room.

In those days we knew that he was going to kill us all, but we didn't know that the world would stand by in silence.

In those days I stuck to you like a postage stamp and you were afraid because my heart was so hot, and people confused us with one another since my features got mixed up with your way of walking, and we were confused by people, since the city became unfit for death after it had turned into a huge repository for my stereotyped metaphors about you.

In those days, when I used to whisper to you that you were the Surah of the Women and the most fertile woman in the Tropic of Cancer, terrorism was striking at the heart of Europe, and my heart that could bear five barbaric wars stutters when it says your name and my European friends withdraw from me quietly, and I remember how the Europeans withdrew from their Jewish friends seventy years ago, and I remember the black milk.
And I try not to remember Paul Celan.

In those days when I loved you gently, terrorism struck violently, and my heart that could look at a fresh wound directly without flinching became smooth as a snake and the Twin Towers collapsed time after time after time in my European friends' fantasies, and the French Revolution was only a victory in history books and a defeat in geography books, and I remember the black milk.

In those days
When I loved you gently
The great migrations crossed Europe violently
And Paul Celan emerged from the River Seine

And with his wet hand tapped me on the shoulder
And in a trembling voice whispered in my ear
Don’t drink the black milk
Don’t drink . . . the black . . . milk
Don’t drink
Don’t
And disappeared among the groups of Syrians marching northwards.

In those days I was still trying not to remember Paul Celan and the Dead Sea was alive and live broadcasts were dead.

IS THE WHOLE AIR THE PATH OF THE GAZELLE

Issam Zineh

The Last Poem I Write

On our trip to the Dead Sea, my daughter couldn’t stop crying because the salt content was so high it burned her vagina.

My best friend refuses to write about flowers but feels it’s acceptable to write about trees—because of the more serious nature of the subject matter.

There’s a moral obligation in poetry not to pass on cruelty through the poem itself.

Yellow bird magnolia.

My daughter asks when I will put the tree swing up.

البستان is Arabic for *the garden*.

Rob Nixon calls “the inattention we have paid to the attritional lethality of many . . . crises” *slow violence*; he means this in the context of ecological
catastrophe.

The Arabic word for *catastrophe* is Nakba (نكبة).

The flowers in the vase are white lisianthus and heather.

In the al-Bustan neighborhood of Silwan, 13 families face home demolition to make way for a religious theme park where some believe King David owned a garden.

A major concern with the lyric “I” is whether the reader can empathize.

Did you know David Jackson’s funeral photo of Emmett Till first appeared in *Jet* magazine?

The word *magazine* comes from the Arabic مخزن which means *storehouse*.

There’s a moral obligation in poetry not to pass on cruelty through the poem itself. I should take the line about my uncle burning newborn mice out of the poem I wrote earlier this week.

In the last poem I write, we pass a bipartisan infrastructure bill. There’s a provision for planting crepe myrtles along the interstate.

The problem with taking it out altogether, as I see it, is that it fails to consider intention.

There’s a moral obligation in poetry not to pass on cruelty through the poem itself. I really should take the line about my uncle burning newborn mice out of the poem I wrote earlier this week—

herbs gathered under the shade of frail acacias

—or maybe I can turn it into a question.

Jaye Nasir

Pastoral

Pavement is only a thin skin, all appointments
all advertisements are only indigestible tack
in the roiling gut of life so when I want to die

it's just because I've bought into the long con
of language, waiting in my waiting rooms
filling out forms believing there is such a thing

as an *hour* or a *failure* when underneath
and in between every fear the mute faceless dream
keeps dreaming itself, growing legs and roots, blood

hot blood cold, rot turning to food and vice versa
as someone outside the frame—probably me—
tries to say what the silence is saying

what the cicadas are singing what the water
is rising towards what history is leaving out
what history is inventing, as eggs hatch as

larvae squirm as the black eyes of animals

look straight into yours as the moldering pulse
of the supermarket thuds along, until all nights are

fluorescent are LED blue, until we have fumigated
our offspring eaten our dead shut our eyes
to every haunting, even then: none of this is data.

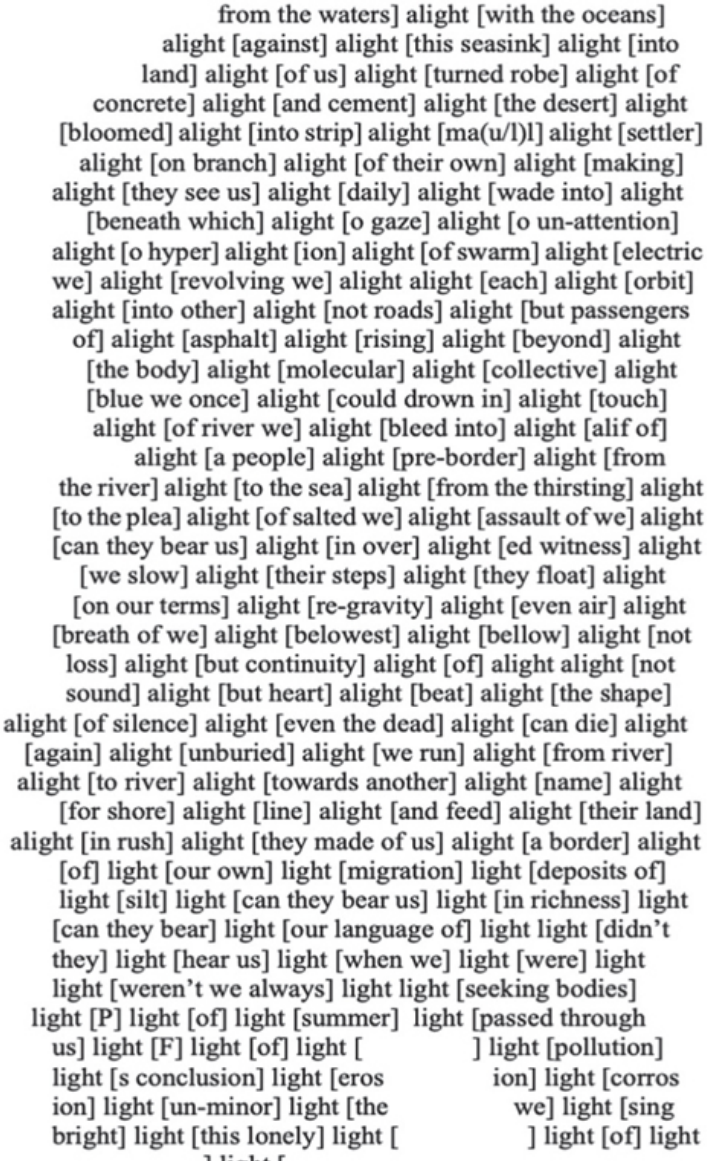
Though all of us are hiding our sobbing thrashing
dreaming selves behind clothes and doctrines
though the god at which you shake your fist

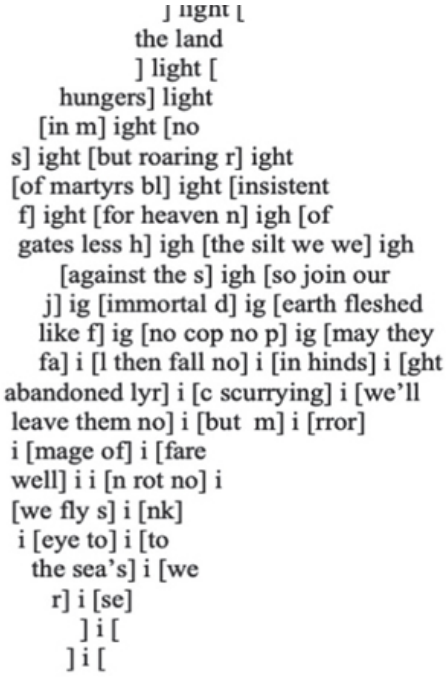
is your other face though all flowers are sexual
organs though the only true life is lived between
the body and the weather and we have poisoned

both, we are already forgiven by death,
so don’t worry if this reality is unconvincing—
the sea is coming to take it back.

George Abraham

the ghosts of the dead sea are rising


from the waters] alight [with the oceans]
alight [against] alight [this seasink] alight [into
land] alight [of us] alight [turned robe] alight [of
concrete] alight [and cement] alight [the desert] alight
[bloomed] alight [into strip] alight [ma(u/l)l] alight [settler]
alight [on branch] alight [of their own] alight [making]
alight [they see us] alight [daily] alight [wade into] alight
[beneath which] alight [o gaze] alight [o un-attention]
alight [o hyper] alight [ion] alight [of swarm] alight [electric
we] alight [revolving we] alight alight [each] alight [orbit]
alight [into other] alight [not roads] alight [but passengers
of] alight [asphalt] alight [rising] alight [beyond] alight
[the body] alight [molecular] alight [collective] alight
[blue we once] alight [could drown in] alight [touch]
alight [of river we] alight [bleed into] alight [alif of]
alight [a people] alight [pre-border] alight [from
the river] alight [to the sea] alight [from the thirsting] alight
[to the plea] alight [of salted we] alight [assault of we] alight
[can they bear us] alight [in over] alight [ed witness] alight
[we slow] alight [their steps] alight [they float] alight
[on our terms] alight [re-gravity] alight [even air] alight
[breath of we] alight [belowest] alight [bellow] alight [not
loss] alight [but continuity] alight [of] alight alight [not
sound] alight [but heart] alight [beat] alight [the shape]
alight [of silence] alight [even the dead] alight [can die] alight
[again] alight [unburied] alight [we run] alight [from river]
alight [to river] alight [towards another] alight [name] alight
[for shore] alight [line] alight [and feed] alight [their land]
alight [in rush] alight [they made of us] alight [a border] alight
[of] light [our own] light [migration] light [deposits of]
light [silt] light [can they bear us] light [in richness] light
[can they bear] light [our language of] light light [didn't
they] light [hear us] light [when we] light [were] light
light [weren't we always] light light [seeking bodies]
light [P] light [of] light [summer] light [passed through
us] light [F] light [of] light [ ] light [pollution]
light [s conclusion] light [eros ion] light [corros
ion] light [un-minor] light [the we] light [sing
bright] light [this lonely] light [ ] light [of] light


] light [
the land
] light [
hungers] light
[in m] ight [no
s] ight [but roaring r] ight
[of martyrs bl] ight [insistent
f] ight [for heaven n] igh [of
gates less h] igh [the silt we we] igh
[against the s] igh [so join our
j] ig [immortal d] ig [earth fleshed
like f] ig [no cop no p] ig [may they
fa] i [l then fall no] i [in hinds] i [ght
abandoned lyr] i [c scurrying] i [we'll
leave them no] i [but m] i [rror]
i [mage of] i [fare
well] i i [n rot no] i
[we fly s] i [nk]
i [eye to] i [to
the sea's] i [we
r] i [se]
] i [
] i [

Dina Abdulhadi

Genesis

I annotated our earth's erosion
attempting to find this poem's pivot.
Brimming with new biblical allusions

sea foam creeps up my toes by the minute.
Water once surged from a world broke open
by the great deep's oil fountains, unmentioned

the last time this happened. We were broken
by storms stacked against us. Who knows what chant
will save us? God annotates our margins

then emarginates our being. I can’t
wait for every creeping man that creepeth
in his bunker ark’d underground to plant

a new world becoming. Drill our seeds deep
into his concrete and stone, sink him
in his own oil. The fresh fruit
of this earth is so much sweeter
than his buckets of armageddon slop.

Ashraf Fayadh

On the Virtues of Oil Over Blood

translated from the Arabic by Mona Zaki

Be aware, may god heal you,
that oil is spread and is loud,
and that oil, as said,
is of great benefit.

*

Oh you who have been made homeless—
your homelessness sprawled across lands,
penniless
and in despair
as oblivion unfurls between your ribs:

*

Your mute blood will never speak out
as long as you brag about death,
and secretly proclaim how you've laid the soul down to those
who cannot understand it.

It will take ages to lose your soul
and console your eyes' fear for all the oil it once gushed.

*

This was what a master once said:
Whosoever has oil can meet his needs from its by-products
which is far better than he who torches his eyes—
turning the heart into a god.

*

You don't own enough
to console you in the face of time's tribulations:
you don't own a tap of blood—
to spend in the face of broken pillars,
nor do you have enough to extract
a tax on that soul of yours that time has wearied.
You don't even have enough to help you through a day of exile.

*

You tremble now,
so take what there is of your blood
to fill the belly of exile—
to gather the overseers' oil
and smother their intention to drag away your soul.
Ask forgiveness of the river—
and loudly apologize as your blood seeps into its waters.

*

It is through oil—that you resist!—
As you unfasten those secured bras
and leisurely taste the cherries and all else—
and enjoy the wetness between the thighs—
may all pleasure be blessed.

*

What next—
when all heretics have pitched the axe into your shoulder?
They say you have gambled with blood that cannot satisfy desire
and that you have filled the taverns with the malaise of joy—
in order to down a glass for free.

*

For free—
aborted words
a used tobacco pouch
and a box—where your mother once trapped your scream—
so that the river can spit you out onto the shore of fear, a kind you've never known.
And there, thunder inseminates the clouds—
rebirthing you as rain that will still be unable to wash the shame of fear from a river
sleeping in the arms of disappointment.

*

Black pellets of oil—
circulate throughout your cells
healing what your nausea

could not expel.

*

Oil is utterly blameless
except for its stains of poverty
on the day when the faces of those who discover another oil well turn black‡
and your heart—will be filled with new life so that your soul is resurrected as oil
for public consumption.
This is the promise of oil—a promise that will come to pass—
The end—

‡ Almost all of this poem is quoted by the court that ruled Ashraf ‘s death sentence. In this line, for example, there is an allusion to Surat al Imran 3:106 of the Qur’an.

Jaye Nasir

Last Rites

It rains so hard I feel I am walking through
the sea, water squelching in my once white

sneakers. We have a moth infestation and I fall
asleep to the sound of a story I cannot guess

the ending of. The light in the house is yellow,
the smell of sage covering over the seeping

rot. It begins with writing down, making legible.
Remembering tomorrow and tomorrow. Begins

in the earth, tangling in roots, eating away
at the foundation. The moths are laying eggs

in the flour right now. Raising families, passing
on traditions. Something is unfolding, something

that likes to be broken is breaking. Call it blood
in both directions, or body of sleep. The Virgin

Mary’s baby bump. Blood out of the palms of
hands or smell of a freshly dug grave or slow

bloom of time. The river is the wild rose bush is
me looking at the river. My sadness came out

of the river on a green gust of wind, so cut out
your own tongue and cut off your own limbs.

All life devolves. All sins are also mine. We are
complicit in everything. We are sorry, very sorry,

so sorry. We are rolling on the floor not laughing,
we are weeping, we are clinging to the bodies

of our dead. I do not believe that the past has
passed. I am sure it is recurring in what’s growing

out of it. Black dirt and rainwater and kissing
through the mouth to reach the less pleasant thing

beneath. I need to prepare, already, for death.
I need to invent a ritual of unearned forgiveness.

Eman Ghanayem

Soils

On crossing the bridge
during the Second Intifada

They call it *the age of flowers* because it’s designed for death.
We mourn the dying young and the living dead. Others don’t.
They don’t have the memory of the earth that births.
They don’t know that whenever one of her own dies,
    she pushes into her very inside a cry for reversal. She relapses
    with every missed heartbeat, collapses into non-motion.
The universal does not remember short-term lives.
A flag flies longer; a strange head floating on that line
    that divides them from us; it watches, waiting
for the mutiny of the body that knows no other gaze.

I saw an old man defecate at the borders.
    He did not know where the private places were.
He looked dead. Maybe he was dead. Under foreboding sky
    that see no quiet, there is no difference
    between life and death, between tears of joy and piss
    that slides over our knees when they hold us
    at the line
    for too long.

Boys and girls with green armor, heavy on their slim, pale bodies
saw him
defecate on the ground
then pass out on a seat, both eyes open.

They call our love hate,
our care, an unhealthy obsession,
and scorn our bodies with the scrutiny of a self-hating god.
I shook my twelve-year-old self.
I grabbed a rock from underneath the man’s seat, threw it at them,
hollering with laughter,

“Eat our shit.”
And the earth with her repressed cry
closed on us, rejoiced—her children,
aged like flowers, knew. Her love,
and ours,
was enough life for now.

Tariq Alarabi

Carob Tree

translated from the Arabic by Fady Joudah

I want to talk with you. It's been a while
since anyone's talked with me, no one around
says to me the things I say to you
when I'm sleepwalking.
For example, yesterday at 3AM the soldiers rained
tear gas bombs on us, ten workers
who crammed in a walk-in refrigerator for produce.
And the gas, like crude oil
that spilled into sea,
a forest fire that occupied all the air.

The carob tree was uprooted.
I still don't know what you're like
when you catch the flu.
Tomatoes are cheap this season
and the farmers are sad.
I've saved the best tomatoes for you.
As for the first thing I do when I wake up
I check the weather.

Weather enthusiasts in Palestine, like followers
of skincare products on Instagram,
are many.

And one more thing, since you’re not here:
do you like eggplant?

—*Nablus*

Deema K. Shehabi

Ghazal: The Sun

Secondhand wrinkles on forehead, she applies kohl in the sun,
eyebrows frown, but then a reprieve: *ahh ahh* the sun.

Ceasefire: Gaza's children pour into the school courtyard
and ask, will they—can they—bomb the sun?

My skin's leafy pattern, your mouth-conjuring
vein, as we trudge along date palms in the sun.

Inside my chest, you are still sewn Palestine, like seedlings
of tiny watermelons, soon-to-become mother balms in the sun.

Fretting in the cell where she has to give birth,
Anhar angles her womb towards a ray, small of sun.

There's a whole house, he says, little of it my creation,
toys, food, and then there's me, flailing in the arms of sun.

A global vaccine war, a nationalist agenda, whose flesh mirrors
violence, which 'other' befalls empire's harm in the sun?

Yahya Ashour

4 poems

Parallelism

Your sorrow has shredded the sky.
It, too, didn’t rain!

Enjoy the Rain

How did I not notice before
that I should enjoy the rain
falling on me
and falling around me
instead of thinking how to collect
as much of it as possible
in one bowl
for me alone?

Half of the World

When I realized that I was standing
in front of a mirror,
I cried, as if I were half of the world,

and this moment caught the attention
of the other half.

The Best Way to Give Roses

My father never gave a bouquet of roses
to my mother,
he gave her rose seedlings.

Mustafa Abu Sneineh

Emperor

translated from the Arabic by Katharine Halls

It isn’t true, Emperor
That “what is not good for the swarm,
is not good for the bee.”*
Permit me, a bee, to set right your meditations:
I no longer have a swarm to fly with
Nor wildflowers who understand my tongue.

The hive has crumbled under the boots of the barbarians.
Traitors betrayed it
and I’d have recited prayers for its courageous soul, if I knew any.

The time of bees is over, Emperor.
Let me fly on fractured wings to another abyss
I leave behind no honey, no wax,
and the flowers I alight on jabber in the barbarians’ language.

Leave me out of your meditations, for I am no good to anyone,
and it’s all the same whether the swarm returns or not,
Emperor,

it’s all the same.

---

* From the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius (121-180).

Fady Joudah

The Onion Poem

Why are there onions the size of swallows in your maple tree?
In the land of cactus wind the one-eyed dwell.

Where is the village whose name holds back the sea?
Caterpillars are for home demolitions in a globe of tents.

Autumn or spring, which is your plumage of choice?
Every empire is a return of the dead.

And Whitman, what would have become of him had you lost the war?
A rooster in rigor-mortis pose makes vultures descend.

Is that the easiest pain?
The Hittites veiled their nuclear weapon for as long as they could.

But lilies have rights, iris amendments?
And the bats for rabies are for the urban sunset.

Are you a tiger or a martyr to deforestation?
The genetic map is over the counter.

And the Black Sea is black.
And the Red Sea red.

And the leaves like waves on the pebble shore?
I rake them. My father’s garden can use some ash.

Naomi Shihab Nye

19 Varieties of Gazelle

A gash of movement,
a spring of flight.

She saw them then
she did not see them.

The elegance of the gazelle
caught in her breath.

The next thing could have been weeping.

Rustic brown, a subtle spotted hue.

For years the Arab poets used “gazelle”
to signify grace
but when faced with a meadow of leaping gazelle
there were no words.

Does one gazelle prefer another
of her kind?

They soared like history
above an empty page.

Nearby, giant tortoises
were kissing.

What else had we seen in our lives?
Nothing better than 19 varieties of gazelle
running free at the wildlife sanctuary . . .

“Don’t bother to go there,”

said a man at our hotel.
“It’s too far.”

But we were on a small sandy island,
nothing was far!

We had hiked among stony ruins
to the Tree of Life.
We had photographed a sign that said
KEEP TO THE PATH in English and Arabic.

Where is the path?
Please tell me.
Does a gazelle have a path?
Is the whole air the path of the gazelle?

The sun was a hot hand on our heads.

Human beings have voices—

what have they done for us?

There is no gazelle
in today’s headline.

The next thing could have been weeping . . .
since when is a gazelle
wiser than people?

Gentle gazelle
dipping her head
into a pool of silvery grass.

I LOVED YOU WITHOUT EVIDENCE

A. D. Lauren-Abunassar

Post Immigration Pastoral

Remember the one that you loved for?
Giving away all their secrets.

Coarse gray ash
on a coarse green field.

Our father skinning
a goat or pretending to.

Forgetting that love takes
change.

Sometimes I want to say *no*
I'm not finished. As a matter of fact

has no matter. Or truth.
Every dream is a little bit jealous

of dying. Every death
is a little relieved.

Remember the two gray trees?
Where the neighbor hung himself

in bundles of wire. And our father
was there to untether him.

For years I dreamt only
of hands. The trees stripped bare

like matchsticks. Coarse
dead body on a coarse live

body. Shouldering him
to the grass. If you could take away

the real things—the pollen sticking to our shirts,
the poplar too pretty to fit,

the lemons wanting
nothing of growing—

I wonder if our father would turn
to a dream. I wonder

who he loved for and left for. Those
widening figs in his hard-polished

eyes. Do you remember
asking why he didn’t cry then? Do you

remember his steady hands?

How badly we wanted to love, in him,

some unliftable part of ourselves?
These days I ask questions badly.

These days I dream of
moving away.

Love, I’m learning, is an act of mercy.
Love is an act

of sacrifice. Our father untangling
a jacket from a branch.

Farah Barqawi

Ants

translated from the Arabic by Sara Elkamel

Every time sadness returns to me, I recall the ants.

Weeks after you left, ants ravaged my bed. They wandered across the clean sheets; stung me mercilessly whenever I lay down to rest. Every time sadness returns, I tell myself it is best you are not here; it is best *we* are no longer here, because your smooth skin—the skin I love—would never withstand their mindless stings.

I experimented with home remedies—I rubbed the bedposts with vinegar; I prepared a mixture of water, peppermint oil and tea-tree oil; and I made sure the sheets were spotless—all in vain. The ants were hellbent on ruining my mood and tirelessly interrupting my sleep.

A friend of mine suggests it is sweat that draws them. Only—I do not sweat without you. They advised me to use chemicals without mercy; claimed antihistamines were particularly effective. Mix it with water and vinegar, spray it everywhere, and the ants will be gone.

But I dragged my feet. Or honestly, I wondered why I would play these

tricks when you would not come back, would not taste their stinging and leave me with my itching guilt. So why try all these tricks when I am alone here, without you? On particularly harsh mornings I started thinking the stings were essential; they remind me that you are gone. I started thinking the ants are not necessarily my enemies—in fact, they could be my only companions as I rid myself of you—and that the sweat that draws them to me, the sweat I am not used to, is how I nightly shed you from my body and spirit so our love does not go to waste—instead, it becomes a sumptuous feast for my unruly friends.

Our love, my darling, is a love that feeds the ants.

Issam Zineh

Coefficients of Friction

The physicist in me,
with polymers mated against steel thrust

washer geometry, in all my traction, grip, and desire,
is trapped in the wrong version of eternity.

You are valuable and dimensionless.
Load and velocity.

Somehow, we manage the perpendiculars
that push us: classic form, controlled damage,

a growing evidence of others.
While we fuck, you remember the lions

of Tsavo, *a hunger wholly justified*
by the cruelty of the colony—how it happens

that the brittle bones of resistance
offer little by way of deliverance.

The animal’s rictus. Lioness with a broken
sheering tooth, apex and insatiate.

You ask if what we know of each other
is literal, say your body is indigenous

and insist I acknowledge the land I’m on.
Then I wake. This is the latest version of the dream.

The basic requirement for movement
is two surfaces: flight is / underwing /

air / a girl on the run / rubber / road
beauty against bone / empire

We believe ourselves nations.
I come to you because I want to come

and because coming is as much
a going away from.

Measurement is its own form of witness.
Tabulate. Immortalize me.

Maya Abu Al-Hayyat

Ordinary Grief

translated from the Arabic by Fady Joudah

I loved you, my love,
there’s no doubting or denying it,
no justification or synopsis,
there isn’t even a story behind it.
It was a collision.
The stairway was rising,
the heavens descending,
and the roads had softened.
I loved you, my love,
as words gather in a poem
and remain forever,
immortal, true, and quotable.
And just as death ceases to be
a logo of end or separation,
I loved you for life
to become elegant, dignified,
useful, for the seasons
to succeed one another,
rhythmic and precise,

for cruelty to rationalize
our capacity to resist, endure.
There’s no doubt or denial.
Look at them, my sighs
as they rise for twenty years.
And check my gaze that recognizes
you in an instant
whenever you pass in a breeze,
look at them as they break
over sidewalks and king-size beds,
and you’ll know, my love,
that I loved you
without evidence,
motive, or demand.

Mustafa Abu Sneineh

Nablus Street

translated from the Arabic by Katharine Halls

It was a wordless confession.
I recall the sun sliding into the darkness of the settlement,
Soldiers with guns beating the sunset
until it passed out.

A lovestruck boy stealing poems from Nizar Qabbani
and love letters from *The Snow Comes Through the Window*.
I'm still a lovestruck boy
Even though the sun has long since gone under
Even though my first confession of love
Was made in the crosshairs of the occupation's guns.

Ashraf Fayadh

Prayers of Longing

translated from the Arabic by Mona Kareem

with a leaf of thorns
I comb my hair. . . gathering the curls,
the way you would gather me in your arms.

***

they said a siege was canceled
and that your worn-out hands
are no longer embraced with shackles.
and that I might meet you

I don’t know how much time passed. . .
passed?
I don’t know
how much. . . passed?
how much waste. . .
and how many silver threads in my head
time had woven

*

pardon me, for your repeated death on my bed
forgive me for forgetting the smell of exhausted sweat
on your bed
There is no lover but you; for I have been in despair

*

pardon me, forgive me;
for not being able to pump more tears for you
for not mumbling your name in longing and loneliness.
I direct my face towards the warmth of your arms
I’ve got no lover but you, you alone,
and I’m the first of your seekers.

Lenna Jawdat

Atmosphere

with lines from Tarfia Faizullah

Lately I’ve found it hard to breathe; high-altitude air
Pang in the chest, heart hug, constriction of blood, stifled air

You can’t keep the windows open at night. Teta will blame
lafhet hawa for my ailments. The culprit: a draft of cool air

As if the invisible mixture of gasses that make up our atmosphere
could be at fault. As if, at velocity, there is threat of air

Goldenglaze of the moon, honeysuckle ripe, palm fronds silhouetted.
I breathe easiest by the ocean, sun-sleepy, slurping salt air.

At night, soaped and soaked, mama tucked me in, my body still swaying
with the rhythm of waves. Night-blooming Cereus saturates air

Bah ya Bah, she stroked my palm, repeated the incantation
a spell she was spinning with breath, spider web of air

Where now is the word for such intimacy? Liminally asleep, my little

hand in hers, slightly larger, chilled bronze. The sound of her air

calling—Lenna, our little one, safe travels to sleep-state beyond.
Today is a sown seed that sprouts into dreams in night air

Deema K. Shehabi

GHAZAL 1

If I die, leave the balcony open
—**Federico García Lorca**

Feet, young and old, tumble by then flee when the balcony opens,
but what about the house that seethes when the balcony opens?

Angels with daggers march through the funeral air of burned
children, and you're in the witness seat when the balcony opens.

I want to watch those voluptuous watermelons prune the ash,
says one angel, so for God's sake keep clear when the balcony opens.

We can't defend this pillow plump with insults, so we beat it down
before the jasmine convenes when the balcony opens.

Without the soil in Palestine, I'm bereft of planting,
soil of succulent green beans, wildly fleeting when the balcony opens.

The hour of magic cats dressed in lavender draws near;
look toward the horizon and halt your weave when the balcony opens.

Says Ondaatje: my love, punctual in green silk, brushes my face
with cinnamon and blurs it into my cheek when the balcony opens.

Let’s double the batch of thyme bread before its scent pierces the earth,
before the dead hunger-heave when the balcony opens.

O brother, why not enter this room solidly with our right foot, ignoring
our torturers, as we fall to our knees when the balcony opens?

Transcendent poet, how will you tiptoe past a walled-in nation
that tramples the lapis lazuli when the balcony opens?

Pain dominates, says the father, but your smile bargains with that devil,
and lightens loads for dreams when the balcony opens.

My sister ruffles the sky, cries the boy in the jeep, and my brother lies
motionless
beside me, but my body will burst into stream when the balcony opens.

O’ love, the length of your rib cage is my given fortune. Look
how the twilight disrobes as I measure your needs when the balcony opens.

Samer Budair

requiem for memory of a mediterranean moon

My mother asks me to step outside and stare at the moon
Together we let it sit in our pupils and wash our irises
She says, “Look at the eyes I’ve given you—
you can only see
your eyes in me and the moon.”

My mother tells me her heart saw me before her eyes,
So that I will always find her heartbeat
When my eyes betray me and I am lost.

My grandmother hasn’t seen the Mediterranean since 1948.
She says she used to sit on the beach with an orange and count the sea’s waves.
She swallowed the orange seeds.
Her house was swallowed by the sea
—an attempt at preservation.
How can you call these lakes
Great if you can count their waves?

My Instagram feed runs through a massacre in Jenin

And greets my friend at a bar in Berlin

For how long
Will I continue to wear black?
Breath before the confines / of a
Line too closely held
Breath(e) before /
don’t leave room between your prayers
Room for the devil
And gunfire.

My grandmother says her heart cannot take it much longer.

Says her lungs can only let so many breaths.
Says her soul can only get so long.
She tells us
Bullets are not all that kill
That grief is their most vicious weapon
Our most familiar friend.

My grandmother lunges off the Mar Saba Monastery
Into the Jordan River,
Walks from the floor of the Mediterranean to go pray
Alongside her husband in
Al-Bahr Mosque.
I look up Orthodox churches near me so maybe
I’ll wind up in Sodom.

My cousins in Jerusalem want to spray paint Golgotha
A tear beneath the skull,
“God is lachrymose at your horrors” beneath it,

“God is horrified and has hidden in Sodom.”

My God, this is the first poem I haven’t written half in Arabic.
I think home is where my books are.

My mother taught me to love God first
This is why I love her, then her, then her, then God.
I once asked her to peel for me a pomegranate
she said, “was my
belly not enough
    pomegranate?”
These days I peel
pomegranates for her.

My mother does not wear her gold.
She left it in homeland.
Gold promises.
Homeland gold promises theft or return.
My mother has sworn return.

Her key is golden.
My grandmother tells us to throw her body
So deep into the sea
that even gold
will rust.
My mother
Tells her the only
Seas here
Are in our eyes.
My grandmother tells us
To swallow her with them.

Suheir Hammad

Prince and Queens

we are homegirls at halftime
heavy rain the singer in a do rag
in a sky blue suit in a tangerine
top raindrops sequin lens and sparkle
screen his face postered girlhoods
oooohhh the do rag been thrown
perm rising up on him a poem
in heels walking tight ass high
notes downpour the guitar
do the damn thing this is what life feels
like up against a wall and all over the scale
impossible women love each through hell
through raspberry smashed gloss smacked
smart mouths tender heads braided hard rocks
we are not the same woman but the same kind
we thank god we don’t love the same
man but the same kind rare prince
so pretty and mimi humming hennessey honey
glazed we’re eating wings rolling
bud we burn fierce wounded
blaze injuries sunday night bowls
in harlem a game and we dance

to his song weather where our hearts
are doves are thunder in deluge
are crying violet oceans in bloom

Shereen Naser

To My Daughters

I do not have a legacy of land
To give you like your great grandfather gave your grandfather
You will not inherit a home your family built
I cannot name the people who planted the olive trees on the path from our home to your cousins' like your great aunt could
My daughters
The thread from you to your ancestors is frayed and heavy from occupation and war But it is not broken
And for you, my flesh and blood
I have a peace offering
I will give you the Arabic passed down to me as my parents fled from Palestine, to Kuwait, to the US
I will give you the recipe for Kusa Mahshi that allows you to replace Kusa with Zucchini when you can't find the right ingredients
I have a trick to use cows milk when you can't find goats milk
I have a peace offering, heart of my heart
With you I will share the patchwork of my Palestinianness
I will show you tatreez and we will make our own designs when we can't remember the ones tata taught us
Together we will stitch a legacy that is fully and wholly yours from the scraps of our exile
We will pull together the pieces of who we are and we will quilt them and

wrap you in them and they will keep you safe
And you will never forget
That they can take our bodies
They can take our land
They can try and rename the food your ancestors made
Even though it existed long before Israel did
But they can never take what we remember
No matter how imperfect it is
My daughter, my heart
All of this is yours

Nadia Said

When Mama Says Allah Yerda 3liky

She means
Thank you for scanning your brother’s documents.
I know you had a long day and I’m grateful you took Baba to his MRI
you made my life a little easier.
you did good.
habibti you look skinny, let me feed you.
I love you.
I’m proud of you.
I will always give you your blessings.
I want the best for you.
I wished for you a better life.
The cost was my life.
You were worth it.
She means,
you will always be worth it.
She means
keep me with you,
as you live the life I’d always dreamed for myself
even if I slow,
or drag,
or dig my heels to the ground.
Please don’t give up on me.

Please don’t leave
me behind.

Hanan Hindi

Mama’s Closet

Every summer, mama opens her closet.
She gives me heels too high for her to wear,
Words she cannot pronounce,
Dresses she cannot fit in,
Dreams she miscarried.

I wore stilettos to defend my dissertation.
It’s too controversial, they said.
For a woman serious about fighting the occupation.

Mama hangs her dreams on the laundry lines
my dad built her in the basement.
The sun doesn’t reach the basement.

Can I have this dress mama?
This thoub is ripped yamma.

Dresses unworn, words unspoken,
a closet of incomplete sentences.

I kept this dress for you, she says,

When you marry a good Palestinian man,
You'll wear it.

Mama folds her words tightly.
Google can't find the translation.

When she moved to America, she never unpacked.

In the corner of her closet, there is a white jewelry box.
They sold her gold to buy Iraqi currency.
The war dismantled the currency.

We have many bills, but Macy's doesn't recognize them.
She buys all the dresses and says, *This was on clearance yamma.*

My ears hurt. I cannot understand this language.

In middle school, Baba gives me 50 cents
for recess. I buy Zebra cakes, ears
to understand, laundry ropes to hang
in the backyard of our home.

Tariq Luthun

I Go to the Backyard to Pick Mint Leaves for My Mother

Today, my mouth fell
wide when I saw the light
slip into the hills, and those boys

I grew up with did not
come back. Or, so I hear. Mama
would often ask me to gather

the mint leaves from behind our home,
and so I would leave for this
nectar—without it, there is nothing sweet

to speak of. I pray that
when I am gone, my people speak
as sweetly of me as I do of them.

I see us, often, steeped
in the land and hope that
a shore remains

a shore—not a place to become
yesterday. The girls have joined the boys
now—all of them

tucked just beyond
the earth. But I know they wouldn’t run
from their mothers—not without a fight,

a chase, a hunt, a honey, a home
for the tea to settle; a haven
for us to return to.

Zeina Azzam

Palestine: Art in Our Breath

Art is not an option.
—Dagmar Painter

We need bright vines
on a blue vase, embroidered
cypress trees to climb, to embrace
a Bethlehem moon, sit in the shade
of tall palms stitched tenderly
with our ancestors' dreams

like Kamal Boullata's light-filled
landscapes, Arabic words mirroring
longing and hope, there is a hunger
to stretch our aching arms,
fly home toward Jerusalem

where Naomi Shihab Nye's
Sitti Khadra points to pockets,
sees beyond the stones,
invites those who return
to find figs and kindness

everywhere, in poems,
at the mountain tops, the sea,
from Mahmoud Darwish’s words
melding odes with a guitar,
almond blossoms with tears,

a horse left alone, a candle
resolute in the Galilee, to the breath

in Amal Murkus’s mellifluous voice
like a hand guiding poetry
to even more loveliness.

Hala Akkawi

Letter to Palestine

It fell on my head
Like mistletoe or a slow Sunday
In a dream, or a paradise of sage and rosemary
Your olive
And a sunburn made of love.

I tilted my head upwards
But my hair was an extension
Of the electric wires that
Wrapped around your waist
And suffocated me.
Your thyme perfume is my air.

I shivered with the sight of the salty tear
That slid on your naked
Face of glory
And watered my dying flowers.

Oh, take me to you, mother of tender.
I could ponder forever about a fig
From Jaffa’s bosom

An orange peel you throw in my face
Or a kiss from a poppy of Galilee’s fields
That shies away from me
Like a dazzled butterfly in a forest of green
A butterfly my eyes cannot catch.

Take me under your lashes
And I’ll surrender to your warm embrace.
Here I am
Kneeling on my mulberry mat
Worshipping your songs

Under the shadows of your apple orchard
In the bitterness of your honey, honey
I have yet to find my place.

Caress me with your stories
Oh, tell me about the summer
When the sun smiled at the dance of the sheep
Oh, how did the olive-picker sleep
After harvesting all day?

Tell me about the vineyard of cherry
That listens to your grief
Like a flute
Or a child’s imaginary friend.

Tell me about the farmer’s tan
the damask roses
That garnished my great grandma’s wedding
And the girl who wished to marry your moon.

Allow me to kiss her face.

Yusuf Ezidden Salah

Ghazal: daughter of the arabs

translated from the Arabic by Bazeed

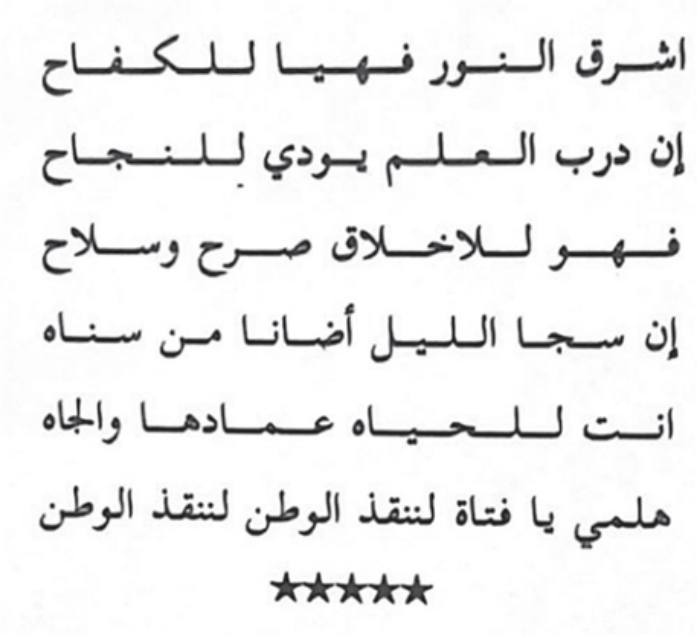
كلمات كتبتها عام ١٩٤٩ بناءاً على طلب مديرة مدرسة رام الله الثانوية، وقد لحنت من قبل السيد يوسف بتروني، وما لبثت أن سجلت في الاذاعة الاردنية، واصبحت فيما بعد ضمن المنهج.

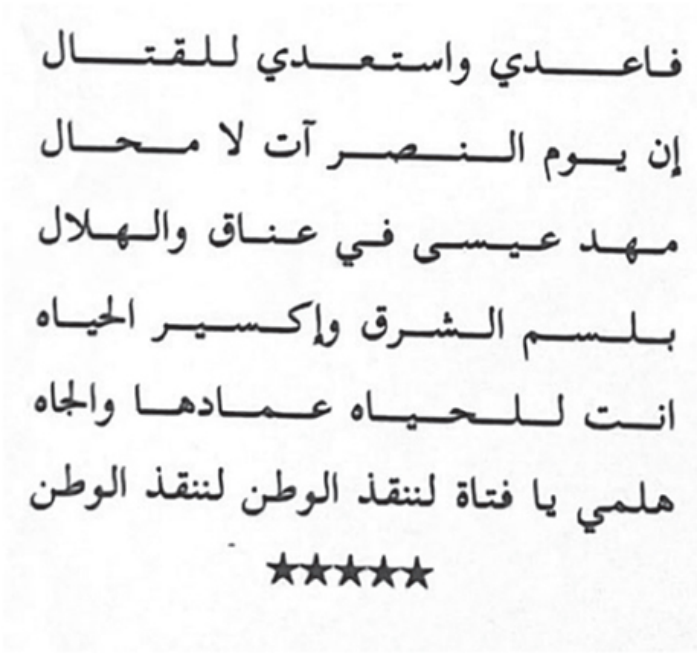
يـا فـتـاة الـعـرب يـا خـيـر فـتـاه
سـابـقـي الـكـون وسـيـري فـي عـلاه
إن افـعـى الجهـل تـودي لـلـردى
فـاحـذريـهـا إيـه يـا نـسـل الاباه
أنـت لـلـحـيـاه عـمـادهـا والجاه
هلمي يا فتاة لننقذ الوطن لننقذ الوطن

★★★★★

انـت لـلامـة تـاج جـوهـر
وبـك الاوطـان دومـا نـفـخـر
وثـراك فـي الـروابـي عـنـبـر
فـي سـمـا الـعـلـيـاء فـواح شـذاه
أنـت لـلـحـيـاه عـمـادهـا والجاه
هلمي يا فتاة لننقذ الوطن لننقذ الوطن

★★★★★


اشرق النور فهيا للكفاح
إن درب العلم يودي للنجاح
فهو للاخلاق صرح وسلاح
إن سجا الليل أضانا من سناه
انت للحياه عمادها والجاه
هلمي يا فتاة لننقذ الوطن لننقذ الوطن
★★★★★


فاعدي واستعدي للقتال
إن يوم النصر آت لا محال
مهد عيسى في عناق والهلال
بلسم الشرق وإكسير الحياه
انت للحياه عمادها والجاه
هلمي يا فتاة لننقذ الوطن لننقذ الوطن
★★★★★

Ghazal: daughter of the arabs

Author's note: I wrote these words in 1949 at the request of

the principal of Ramallah Girls High School. They were subsequently set to music by composer Yousef Batrouni, and soon thereafter recorded for broadcast by Jordanian radio, after which the song was added to the school's curriculum.

race the universe and rise its inheritor! goodness is in you, daughter.
know its zenith for your birthright, sure as the arabs leave behind a daughter.
ignorance is a snake hissing welcome to the pit; hear us! fear its capture.
for in you are legacy and lineage and future, sure as you are daughter.
you are Life's buttress, yare of heart, strong of might, of eminence made, and glory
come then let us save it, the old country! won't birthright know its only daughter?

***

on its head rest, daughter crown of our nation, your brilliance bejewels our pride
hear them? our countries across all borders, taking your name for anthem, daughter?
elevated pace to elevated place, you trail a trace of warmed amber
your scent dissolving in vapor water, skies rain thanksgiving for you, daughter.
you are Life's buttress, yare of heart, strong of might, of eminence made, and glory
come then let us save it, the old country! birthright near as skin to you, daughter.

***

the sun dawns on a new day of struggle; we rise with its rising to meet it

the road to victory is an epistemology—seek its earth, daughter.

learning is as a castle on a high hill, for one’s manners to inhabit.
a night could last, and last, and last. still dawn will break its back. sure as day, daughter!
you are Life’s buttress, yare of heart, strong of might, of eminence made, and glory
come then let us save it, the old country! birthright near as day to you, daughter.

***

prepare yourself for now’s battle. of weapons and wit make ready what you must.
the day of our return is certain as sun. there’s dawn confirming it, daughter.
the crescent sentinels the night sky, its light a blessing on Jesus’ cradle.
balsams both to Eastern sky and spirit, drink them as Life’s elixirs, daughter.
you are Life’s buttress, yare of heart, strong of might, of eminence made, and glory
come then let us save it, the old country! birthright never lost to you, daughter.

leena aboutaleb

Of a Coming World

after Fargo Tbakhi, with lines from Mona Saudi

eye-less God, gutted sky, the scraping stones
misting in heaven’s front doors, arch-angels &
flutes, sterile heaven, wrought fire, dissolving tear
-gas, silent angels, tree-killers, Of expulsion, Of bonebreakers,
Of a thousand longings, a haunting of afterlives
the idea Of the Nation in a dutifullandscape,
trees placed loving, National Fund shrieks eagerly
blistering in a rage, a critical curiosity long passing,
Of a founded blood, Of a living archive & breathing ghosthearts,
a pot-bellied desperation, damaged moonlights,
the sea hungering against shores, hollowing words,
ancestral gods, claimed pathways,
fossiling whales and dinosaurs in new-born deserts, bow your head
heavy with light, suckling on a thunder,
the ghosts bursting corridors are yelling and dying
do not open the door,
wounded sun-loving hands pulling nails in this
glistening earth, the sails marking Love,
my palms holding my ex-lover like new sheets,

the mountains loz-blossoming and pregnant, poignant citrus
flesh on hair, the jasmine reaping a scythe,
the moss with no tongue,
poppies’ grieving mouths, the flinch razing open land,
the sun-shy ghosts urging rapture in my country,
we are made collateral damage for the end of times
the exodus rescheduled, the sea moans in pleasure, remaking fantasy
O, where do I put my knees up? the fog is frosting, the sea
calling empire’s drying bones, a band of pirates,
Of prisons’ defeat, Of a salon of ghosts waltzing
in retribution, you say History, I say history, what Of language
to birds beyond & after the last sky? Once, we stood. Once,

the phoenix led a trail. Bethlehem, a domestic forest,
elegies of dust and scorched rooms, our Love was there
and we were Love, rooted in a night without kisses, I hold you
in my palms and flinch when you open towards me.
We are coming [back]. a flushing, bottomed grief, an expiring
dark, a wild bird brought forth like a basilisk,
Of I loved you & you I, Of our betrayals, Of
I did not lie when I said you are my home
(apartheid or naught). tonight, I am Born and
tonight, I will Die. this, a demand for love.

BITTER ENGLISH

Fargo Tbakhi

Of

my last obedience to the restraints Of the language Of bone breakers,
to the tyranny inside the gloved hand, inside Of, I dissolve it now,
I offer it to you slaughtered like a purveyor Of tear gas, gutted like
a sustainer Of museums, I beg you now, who from the last
will be present, anchoring my every tooth, planted in a garden
fertilized by the ashes Of Qalandia, rend my body, bring life to Arabs,
bring water to wash my body Of blood, I will be wrath Of,
song Of, blade and flame Of, tooth and nail Of, I will entomb
the remnants Of a board Of directors inside my own heart,
your hands forgiving the debts Of rule, translating the missives
Of scorpions, the homilies Of Molotovs, breathing the dessications
Of security cameras, you crater Of tongue, you loveliness in retribution,
tributary Of unpriced goods, Of fire and ice, Of a program to liberate,
Of the drowning of conquerors, Of an endless intifada, you singer Of
a stone to the skull Of a soldier, here I beg you with libations Of tanks,
with offerings Of hair, Of loss, Of the suit Of a banker, Of boots pried
from the feet which carried a corpse to its nest at Qalandia, I give you
my fears and my hesitancies, to cast into the depths, to unlanguage, I beg
    you,
lower me my heart the hewn signature Of a stonemason,
bring me low, unmake me roughly silica dust outlining my shape
like an angel silent in the poisoned air, steady my rifle

aimed toward the killing Of treeplanters, the righting Of sins,
the breathing Of earth, the dreaming Of children, Of this, Of more,
sing, empty the earth Of song to pour into my ventricled weapon,
you made with earth and a million stomping feet, what is low
in me make sharp, what is hurt in me make sharper,
and what is light in me, and what in me
is light?

Sara M. Saleh

Punctuation as Organised Violence

a response to Sun of Consciousness and Other Works *by Édouard Glissant*

–

1. Thirty years ago, my folks migrated to a city half-dipped in ocean. To this day, they are sepia-faced and prayer-shaped, coal soot and cedar hills still rolling underneath their fingernails.

2. Arab-Australian
   Arab Australian
   ArabAustralian

   This arbiter of gods. This wretched frontier: duality or hybridity?

3. The Arabic language does not have hyphens, because the breaking of something from the inside is not allowed or we continue on as if it is not broken.

   We ration bags of zaatar and green almonds and joke in our parents' accents. In this place, we have learned to leaven like dough.

4. Colony wants to uproot the cedar from our nails. To be citizen is gauze negotiating with festering exit wound.

.

1. Father says. maybe it does not. always. have to be. a choice. between the smell of bread. or the smell of bullets.

2. The officer who watched the burning cities on my father's shoulders said, "This land is for the living. For the free." And stamped the papers. "Welcome. Welcome." Each welcome a blister. A pledge to an elusive "Australian future."

3. Welcome. To back beating labour. To being taxed out of beloved, grey-lipped houses, for the motorway and a multiplex centre. To brazen high-rises and rooftop gardens and high ceilings with delicate emerald trimmings. To where they constantly move salvation beyond our reach.

4. Application. Visa. Policy. Border. Fence. Ceremony. Father didn't know then, are all elements of fiction, too.

,

1. My folks grew me on a land thick with eucalyptus, moss, metropole, genocide

2. Arab, Australian, Other, Amen

3. My first words stumbled out, shreds of language on a clumsy tongue, clenched in between the aches of this suspect body

   our lands, our skies, our lines

   heirlooms cannot be
   fractured, or curated so
   quietly in your museums and
   galleries

3. Does a comma slow the chaos, or expand it?

4. Arab
   Australian
   Other

   In a dropdown list,
   who I am does not exist in
   English, violence enacted by
   a box, these algorithms
   of absence

‘

1. Every day, mama and baba plant the alphabet at first light. Their citrusskinned bodies are whole canons. Our lashes licking the sun, we make our way into the golden harvest.

2. Mama and baba, they’re so thin now. The words for what is killing us also thinning.

3. Apostrophe: to contract or to subdue; to possess

4. Sundays at Arabic school, we chewed mastic-flavoured gum loudly and rolled our eyes at Mr Hamza’s conjugations. I must have missed the (grammar) lesson then: That which you think you possess first possesses you.

()

1. Australia
   Largest exports: metals, minerals, grains
   Largest imports: ~~machinery, precious metals, plastics,~~ human beings (Colony honours itself with statues and streets and medals and prefers

we don’t ask whose land we are on and who builds everything around here.)

2. The Migration Act (people are footnotes).

3. Colony is a chalk outline.

   We are up to our necks in fuel and muted prayers and neat piles of grief.
   Let us swing baseball bats instead of lighting more candles.
   I know it is not convenient (when will it be?)

4. Silence in a place is the same as not existing (and they expect us to not exist).

5. My folks did not march at protests and chant slogans and they never explained preferential voting. They lined up at the phone booth for hours as the promised rains came, cradling 50 ¢ coins and two screaming toddlers waiting for a chance to call home. They worked dishwashing and cleaning shifts to scrape enough for my medical bills and one book from the Scholastic sheet (and what is more revolutionary?).

CAPITAL

Invasion /
Terra Nullius /
White Australia /
Immigration /
English /
Multiculturalism /
Democracy /
Anti-Terror laws, over 82 and counting /
Countering Violent Extremism /
Afghanistan /
Iraq / / / / / / / / / / / / / / /

1. My people are not recognised in national legislation that protects from Racial Discrimination. Why do these Laws matter more than we do? What of these holy texts lodged deep in the dredges of country?

2. How long must we live in a world that only offers Dust in our eyes and is there such a thing as courtesy in a War we never asked for?

3. I don’t want a world where we are Almost Beautiful.

4. Is Death still any less a Death if it is taking its time?

Ahmad Almallah

Bitter English

that I own no one language cuts me through
that I find this english tongue I use day after day
boring, in construction, even in poetry, cuts me
in the middle of sentiment and sentence

I do not understand this sound, I stumble
as I say to myself I will ignore these english words
emptied today, I walk down the street catching
my hand in the air, greeting faces I know I don’t know

as I walk these streets only owning past echoes
cutting through this language, this english tongue
I want to catch with my teeth cuts me through

that I have to stack all my old and new passports
on my writing cuts me through—I go over
my exits and entries for this citizenship, my first
step, I doubt, to owning something of this sound

I owe everything to one place that owns me, not
here, where what I owe I do not own, time and many

years spared because this english tongue cuts me
through, because this english tongue owes me

a language

Samer Budair

home // عـدم الوجود

I am without a home.

لا أستطيع أن أترجم هذه الجملة
نعم، أنا بلا دارٍ وبلا بيتٍ وبلا منزلٍ وبلا وطنٍ أيضاً
انني مطرود وإقامتي مؤقتة

I am dispossessed, as dispossessed as my mother tongue and my mother's tongue

My language does not possess a home.

أبي يعاتبني لأنني أقول له أنني لا أعلم

My mother does not understand me when I ask her if there is a translation for home.

شجرة جارتي ترسم على نافذتي بفرشاة أوراقها
صورة ساخرة بماء الغيث ولون أوراقها

Even the air here seems to laugh at the twists my tongue takes in search of a home.

They asked me why all I write about is war

سألوني لماذا كل ما اكتبه عن الحرب
وليس عن الحب أو المأساة

and not love or tragedy

لكنني أكتب، نعم، أكتب
إنها عن عروبة مأساتنا ومأساة عروبتنا

It’s about the Arabness of our tragedy
and the tragedy of our Arabness.

أنا لا أنتمي،
كورقة العنب، هويتي نتفت من يدي.
واسمي يبقى الدليل الوحيد لبقائي.

Heba Hayek

Full Interview

Please
can you explain
who you fear
in your home
country?

On the first page of my transcript is a note that
my interview officer is WFH today
He uses green screen
a photo of an office space, white walls
dark green window liners
Everything in the space must suggest
neutrality
Even the weather in the
quickly googled office background
pale grayish skin
short sentences
retracted polite/awkward smiles
all neutral
except me.

I find it unnerving that
the most anticipated interview of my life
is happening virtually.
The officer is a bit rattled
He’s forty-seven minutes late
casually blames it on workers
makes an inappropriate joke
and lets me know that recording
begins now.

Please

can you describe life
in the Gaza strip?

I find it hilarious that
I am basically here to report on
British Mandate Criminal Code of 1936
which remains in force until today.

I spent too many nights
holding onto sweet memories
to be here now.
Around my lips tastes like metal
as I bite to remember
what I spent my entire life forgetting.

Please
can you describe
what are you afraid of the most
if you go back?

A flash of color
gemstones in the sun
each time I speak of you
my beloved
a fire erupts
I pray it’s not war
then somehow, war always
catches up.

I wonder what in the world is worth this much disparity.

This is not a perfect story
may I suggest
It’s exactly the kind of thing
you bury and maybe
one day
you make songs about.

This is not *that*
kind of party.
No formalities
You can step in
with your shoes on
Because after all
this isn’t my home

under my fingernails it appears like dark red flakes
and smells like blood.
This is not home.
No birds in the palm of my hand
to let go

Not enough nights
to count the stars.

Please
let me know
if you think
you need a break

I think of the way my wet body feels on
freshly washed sheets
in the summer

Everyone wants to hear about how good my life is
except the Home Office.

Nathalie Handal

:3

Un posto ci sarà per questa solitudine

From a place where memory is a reservoir. From an old wound. A war. From a room of fantasies. From the faint voice of pleasure. From the view of our naked bodies. From the road that leads to mirrors. From the mirrors that lead to hums. From the pleasure we unlearned, and learned late again. From this rhythm we keep. From this passion we endure. From this mystery that tells us we lost everything in one room, and found we belonged somewhere after all.

Un posto ci sarà per essere felici

Why find out who we are? Why remember all we did? Why think of what changed us? Why think of what challenged us; what kept us away from what we began? When a heart empties a gaze. When a memory turns on another memory, which of your voices is mine? Only mine. We slip through each other as if the cities we came from meant nothing to the world.

Un posto ci sarà dove si spera ancora la a gente porterà una storia nova

When we are lonely, the city opens itself to remind us no one is alone, all

the time, and then the wind delivers a day, light moves to make space for nameless friends, a saint tells us what the heart didn’t dare to, and we come to know, each time we believe music is memory, the waters ask us to look into its eyes.

Priscilla Wathington

HUNGRIEST ORGAN

the water of me goes out

يعود

the body flux

of basin
of hailstone

until our eyes grow new scopes the state gathers food
slip of thread between cells

empire the hungriest organ

marshal walls
the pant seams can be let out
leave them in the basket under the armchair

the separation of us is in the syntax

each dialect its own creek

semantics widen narrow with channel

phonemes dropped sediments
monument the journey

find the path of least resistance over the cliffs

if this folk physics
so our optimism

what goes up

how much of your water in the sky
over Palestine this day?

حائط
an unstable symbol
evaporating off the top
the infant mortality indicator is a harbinger
some winters, what goes out does not return

Aziza Okab

an ode to the city i live in that will never be home

we fell in love in a city that will never love us back
we found a house to stay in
that even our plants know is temporary
that must be why they are always wilting,
no matter how often we quench their thirst.

i grow restless of my arabic sounding like a siren
grow tired of the conversations i have with strangers
in limited hebrew
with the reluctant nods and smiles
grow tired with the “i have many arab friends”
i want to say منشان الله ما تحكوش معي
but this city does not speak my language.
i do not see my language for days on any store signs
only the ice cream parlor has my language—
it gives the flavors an exotic edge.

in this city i am everything but myself
i am persian, moroccan, anything but palestinian
they look at my bare shoulders and cannot

in their wildest imagination
picture my beautiful mother in her *hijab*.
i tell them where i am from
and they tell me “for sure you are christian”
it is never a question.

they hear my american accent
they willingly forget i am arab
“she is not really arab
not really.”

this city does not light its sky with stars
i look up at a suffocating blanket of darkness.
and the dark men who walk the streets are visible
but never seen.
i cannot wear my mashrou’ leila shirt in peace.
شوپ شوپ قوصوك

i wake up to the news
of house demolitions in wadi hummus,
wake up to an instagram video of israeli soldiers smiling
as they blow a palestinian home to smithereens,
i go to work and listen to people speak in hebrew around me,
hear a man say *todah* when i hold the door open for him.

عفوا.

Nadeen Alalami

Ya Quds / يا قدس

The roads to you leave my tongue twisted. I’m swallowing
shards. I’m lying through my teeth. I’m lying your name.

Your narrators are getting old. There are
lesions on their tongues and on their brains.

They tell and retell.
I tell and retell.
I am a thief. Cut off my arms—
the ink leaking.
the old dying.
the young forgetting.

But there was a time—before.
You were a city and they never called me nomad.

I remember—
Slicing my hand on a piece of life.
Sucking droplets of red
on my palms, my tongue.
A sweet sour stain of raspberries

on my favorite summer dress.
Before.
The famous migration. The abandoned child.
I dreamed it a century.

Not here.

Ya Quds
Whose story are you?
Whose memory?

Ya Quds

I want to leave my fingerprints everywhere on your body. I want to find your soil lodged beneath my fingernails.
I want to bleed you. I want to stain you.

I want to shout you, but it hurts to say your name.
My wound eludes me. I can’t localize the pain.

I think I lost you somewhere between Amman and Dubai, between my grandmother’s memories and my father’s words, between stuttered Arabic and fluent English.

Sometimes I catch you in a dream.

Sometimes my tongue slips and finds your words.
Ya Quds

Let me speak you.

Mosab Abu Toha

PALESTINE — A-Z

A

An apple that fell from the table on a dark evening when man-made lightning flashed through the kitchen, the streets, and the sky, rattling the cupboards and breaking the dishes.

“Am” is the linking verb that follows “I” in the present tense when I am no longer present, when I’m shattered.

B

A book that doesn’t mention my language or my country, and has maps of every place except for my birthplace, as if I were an illegitimate child on Mother Earth.

Borders are those invented lines drawn with ash on maps and sewn into the ground by bullets.

C

Gaza is a city where tourists gather to take photos next to destroyed buildings or graveyards.

A country that exists only in my mind. Its flag has no room to fly freely, but there is space on the coffins of my countrymen.

D

Dar means house. My grandparents left their house behind in 1948 near Yaffa beach. A tree my father told me about stood in
the front yard.

Dreams of children and their parents, of listening to songs, or watching plays at Al-Mishal Cultural Center. Israel destroyed it in August 2018. I hate August. But plays are still performed in Gaza.
Gaza is the stage.

E

An email account that I used when the power was on, the email through which I smelled overseas air. I used it first to send photos to my aunt in Jordan, who we last saw in 2000.

How easy it becomes to recognize what kind of aircraft it is: an F-16, helicopter, or a drone? What kind of a bullet it was: from a gunboat, an M-16, a tank, or an Apache? It's all about the sound.

F

Friends from school, from the neighborhood, from childhood. The books in my living room in Gaza, the poems in my notebooks, still lonely. The three friends I lost to the 2014 onslaught: Ezzat, Ammar, and Ismael. Ezzat was born in Algeria, Ammar in Jordan, Ismael on a farm. We buried them all under the cold ground.

Fish in our sea that the fishermen cannot catch because the Israeli gunboats

care about sea life in the Mediterranean. They once fished at the Gaza beach with a barrage of shells, and Huda Ghalia lost her father, stepmother, and five siblings in June 2006. I walked in their funeral procession to the cemetery. Blood was still fresh on their clothes. They had poured out some perfume to cover the stench. Over time my hate for perfume grew intense.

G

How are you, Mosab? I'm good. I hate this word. It has no meaning to me. Your English is good, Mosab! Thanks.

When I was asked to fill out a form for my US J-1 visa application, my country, Palestine, was not on the list. But lucky for me, my gender was.

H

If a helicopter stops in the sky over Gaza, we know it's going to shoot a rocket. It doesn't see if a target is close to children playing marbles or soccer in the street.

My friend Elise told me hey is a slang word and shouldn't be used. "English teachers would faint at what goes on today in written English," she said.

I

Images on the walls of buildings, a child who was shot by an Israeli sniper, or killed during an air raid en route to school. Her picture was placed on her desk at school. Her picture stares at the blackboard, while the air sits in her chair.

I wake up ill when gloomy ideas about what might've happened to me come

in my dreams, what if I had stopped for a few seconds at the window when a bullet from nowhere ripped through the glass.

J

Once I sent a picture of my desk in Gaza to a friend in the United States. I wanted to show that I was fine. On the desk were some books, my laptop, and a glass of strawberry juice.

When I sent that photo, I was jobless. About 47% of people in Gaza have no work. But while writing these lines, I'm trying to start a literary magazine. I still don't know what to name it.

K

My grandfather kept the key to his house in Yaffa in 1948. He thought they would return in a few days. His name was Hasan. The house was destroyed. Others built a new one in its place. Hasan died in Gaza in 1986. The key has rusted but still exists somewhere, longing for the old wooden door.

In Gaza you don't know what you're guilty of. It feels like living in a Kafka novel.

L

I speak Arabic and English, but I don't know in what language my fate is written. I'm not sure if that would change anything.

Light is the opposite of heavy or dark. In Gaza, when the electricity is cut off, we turn on the lights, even in broad daylight. That way, we know when the power's back.

M

Marhaba means hi or welcome. We say Marhaba to everyone we see. It's like a warm hug. We don't use it, however, when soldiers or their bullets or bombs visit us. Such guests not only leave their shit, but also take everything we have.

My dad used to prepare milk for us with some qirshalah before school. I was in 3rd grade, and my mother was at hospital taking care of my brother. My brother died in 2016.

N

In 2014, about 2,139 people were killed, 579 of them were children, around 11,100 were wounded, around 13,000 buildings were destroyed. I lost 3 friends. But it's not about numbers. Even years, they are not numbers.

A nail is used to join two pieces of wood or to hang things on the wall. In 2009, the Israelis targeted an ambulance with a nail bomb near my house. Some were killed. I saw many nails on our neighbor's newly painted wall.

O

Yaffa is known around the world for its oranges. My grandmother, Khadra, tried to take some oranges with her in 1948, but the shelling was heavy. The oranges fell on the ground, the earth drank their juice. It was sweet, I'm sure.

In Gaza, we had a clay oven that our neighbor Muneer built for us. When my mother wanted to bake, I fed it wood stems or cardboard to heat it for the bread. The woody stems were made from dried plants: pepper, eggplant, and cornstalks.

P

A poem is not just words placed on a line. It’s a cloth. Mahmoud Darwish wanted to build his home, his exile, from all the words in the world. I weave my poems with my veins. I want to build a poem like a solid home, but hopefully not with my bones.

On July 23, 2014, a friend called and said, “Ezzat was killed.” I asked which Ezzat. “Ezzat, your friend.” My phone slipped from my hand, and I began to run, not knowing where.

What’s your name? Mosab. Where are you from? Palestine. What’s your mother tongue? Arabic, but she’s sick. What’s the color of your skin? There is not enough light to help me see.

Q

We were watching a soccer match. Comments and shouts filled the room. The power was cut off, and everything became quiet. We could hear our breathing in the dark.

Al-Quds is Arabic for Jerusalem. I have never been to al-Quds. It’s around 60 miles from Gaza. People who live 5,000 miles away can move there, while I cannot even visit.

R

I was born in November. My mother told me she was walking on the beach with my father. It turned stormy and began to rain. My mother felt pain, and an hour later, she gave birth to me. I love the rain and the sea, the last two things I heard before I came into this horrible world.

S

I like to go to the beach and watch the sun as it sinks into the sea. She's going to shine on nicer places, I think to myself.

My son's name is Yazzan. He was born in 2015, or a year after the 2014 war. This is how we date things. Once he saw a swarm of clouds. He shouted, "Dad, some bombs. Watch out!" He thought the clouds were bomb smoke. Even nature confuses us.

T

In the summer, I drink tea with mint. In the winter, I add dried sage. Anyone who visits, even if it's a neighbor knocking at the door to ask about what day or date it is, I offer them tea. Offering tea is like saying Marhaba.

They once said Palestine will be free tomorrow. When is tomorrow? What is freedom? How long does it last?

U

It wasn't raining that day, but I took my umbrella anyway. When an F-16 flew over the town, I opened my umbrella to hide. Kids thought I was a clown.

In August 2014, Israel bombed my university's administration building. The English department was turned into a ruin. My graduation ceremony got postponed. Families of the dead attended, to receive not a degree, but a portrait of their child.

V

When we moved from Cambridge to Syracuse, I looked out the window of the U-Haul van. What a huge country America is, I thought. Why did Zionists occupy Palestine and still build settlements and kill us in

Gaza and the West Bank? Why don't they live here in America? Why can't we come here to live and work? My friend heard me. He was from Ireland. We both loved the Liverpool football club.

In Gaza, you can find a man planting a rose in the hollow space of an unexploded tank shell, using it as a vase.

W

One day, we were sleeping in our house. A bomb fell on a nearby farm at 6 a.m., like an alarm clock waking us up early for school.

In August 2014 after the 51 days of Israeli onslaught, the walls in my room had more windows than when I left, windows that would no longer close. Winter was harsh on us.

X

When I was wounded in January 2009, I was 16. I was taken to hospital and x-rayed for the first time. There were two pieces of shrapnel in my body.

One in my neck, another in my forehead. Seven months later, I had my first surgery to remove them. I was still a child.

For Christmas, a friend gave the kids a xylophone. It had one wooden row. The bars were of different lengths and colors, red, yellow, green, blue, purple, and white. The kids showed it to their grandparents back in Gaza, whose eyes danced while the kids smiled.

Y

Yaffa is my daughter's name. I put my ears near her mouth when she speaks,

and I hear Yaffa’s sea, waves lapping against the shore. I look in her eyes, and I see my grandparents’ footsteps still imprinted on the sand.

How did you leave Gaza? Do you plan to return? You should stay in the US.

You mustn’t think of going back to Gaza. Things people say to me.

Z

When I was in the fifth grade, our science teacher wanted us to visit a zoo, to see the animals, listen to their sounds, watch how they walk and sleep. When I went there, they were bored, gave me their back. They lived in cages in a caged place.

We use a zero article with most proper nouns. My name and that of my country have an extra zero in front, like when you call overseas. But we have been pulled down beneath the seas, do you see what I mean?

Sara Abou Rashed

In Arabic, the Word for “War” Is Similar to “Love”

On his way to a first kiss, a soldier
enters a flower shop. He fingers dozens

of roses and determines the longevity of each
by the number of its petals.

When children protested the regime
then died in its prisons, officers

sent the fathers notes that read:

Come pick up the corpse in exchange for the mother,
we’ll ensure she bears another one.

On the table, a bouquet of 24—one for every
month in service. His nails tug

until red tissue, lining the sacred opening, unravels,
a torn uterus where once a butterfly

didn’t ask permission.

Yahya Hassan

CHILDHOOD

translated from the Danish by Jordan Barger

FIVE CHILDREN IN LINE AND FATHER WITH A CLUB

CRYING IN CHORUS AND A POOL OF PISS

ONE BY ONE WE STICK OUT OUR HANDS

FOR THE SAKE OF PREDICTABILITY

THEN THE SOUND OF BLOWS LANDING

SISTER JUMPS SO QUICKLY

FROM ONE FOOT TO THE OTHER

THAT THE PISS IS A WATERFALL DOWN HER LEG

FIRST ONE HAND THEN THE OTHER

IF IT TAKES TOO LONG THE SMACKS

COME AT RANDOM

A SMACK A SCREAM A NUMBER 30 OR 40 OR SOMETIMES 50

AND ONE LAST SMACK ON THE ASS ON THE WAY OUT THE DOOR

HE TAKES MY BROTHER BY THE SHOULDER

STRAIGHTENING HIM UP

KEEPS HITTING AND COUNTING

I LOOK DOWN AND WAIT FOR MY TURN

MOM SMASHES DISHES IN THE HALLWAY

MEANWHILE AL-JAZEERA TRANSMITS

HYPERACTIVE BULLDOZERS AND MANGLED CORPSES

THE GAZA STRIP IN THE SUNSHINE

FLAGS WILL BE BURNT

IF A ZIONIST DOESN’T RECOGNIZE OUR EXISTENCE

IF WE EXIST AT ALL

WHEN WE HEAVE WITH PANIC AND PAIN

WHEN WE GASP FOR BREATH OR MEANING

THEY WON’T LET US SPEAK ARABIC IN SCHOOL

THEY WON’T LET US SPEAK DANISH AT HOME

A SMACK A SCREAM A NUMBER

Bassam Jamil

the voice

translated from the Arabic by Nicole Mankinen

the voice pulls you
to confess the duress
postponed over lifetimes
flowing through bloodlines

swift blows absorbed
no more tongues form
no words release just breath
admit no less than strength

your way home is through words
with letters not yours
corrupt are the lines
the rhyme of your exile

you who try to pass borders
forget the banks of language
don’t settle down
don’t woo

scream your name to confess
you— in this way— live

Maya Abu Al-Hayyat

Autobiography of Fear

translated from the Arabic by Yasmine Seale

In the twenty-six years I lived in Palestine
I never took part in a demonstration
Never threw a stone
Never joined a political bloc
Never took pleasure in explosions
Never called on anyone to support anyone
And yet
I lost my lover to a bullet in the head
A phone call saved me from a bullet in the head
My bedroom shook
As I watched the bullets fly
From behind the closet door
I was arrested on the side of the road
My car was blocked by a tank twenty times
I walked for ten hours through the mountains to get home
When the soldiers sent me back
I passed a checkpoint
Two thousand five hundred times
I breathed in a full can of teargas

That had fallen at my feet
Another can my children breathed
Inside the car
The car’s windows had to be replaced
Three times in a single month
I left my home
Went back and swept the glass
Off the carpets and pillows
I lived for six continuous months under curfew
(Not counting COVID)
I strolled through cemeteries
In the company of girlfriends
I counted the bullets
Raining down on our neighbourhood
To find sleep
I knew the types of plane
By their sound
The class of bomb
By their smoke
The form of fear
By its smell
I went out and came home
I ate and learned and washed
Bathed and loved and gave birth
To the rhythm of breaking news

WHAT I WANT IS NEVER CALLED NATION

Ghayath Almadhoun

We

translated from the Arabic by Catherine Cobham

We, who are strewn about in fragments, whose flesh flies through the air like raindrops, offer our profound apologies to everyone in this civilized world, men, women, and children, because we have unintentionally appeared in their peaceful homes without asking permission. We apologize for stamping our severed body parts into their snow-white memory, because we have violated the image of the normal, whole human being in their eyes, because we have had the impertinence to leap suddenly on to news bulletins and the pages of the internet and the press, naked except for our blood and charred remains. We apologize to all those who did not have the courage to look directly at our injuries for fear they would be too horrified, and to those unable to finish their evening meals after they had unexpectedly seen fresh images of us on television. We apologize for the suffering we caused to all who saw us like that, unembellished, with no attempt having been made to put us back together or reassemble our remains before we appeared on their screens. We also apologize to the Israeli soldiers who took the trouble to press the buttons in their aircraft and tanks to blow us to pieces, and we are sorry for how hideous we looked after they aimed their shells and bombs straight at our soft heads, and for the hours they are now going to spend in psychiatrists' clinics, trying

to become human again, like they were before our transformation into repulsive body parts that pursue them whenever they try to sleep. We are the things you have seen on your screens and in the press, and if you made an effort to fit the pieces together, like a jigsaw, you would get a clear picture
of us, so clear that you would be unable to do a thing.

Ghassan Zaqtan

Biography in Charcoal

translated from the Arabic by Fady Joudah

He will resemble me the one who will say to her:
People have fallen asleep
and the horses have grown decrepit in their enemies.

He will resemble me the one who calls out to his family
so it can be said:
We heard a voice from the night
whose swings were of women’s hair.

Then the sound sculpts me until I disappear
in order for those who saw to remember me.

Thus the singer
and the song
are alike.

leena aboutaleb

art exhibition: west bank girl on fire

they hang our bodies
art exhibition: *west bank lovers*
we burn the flag for settlers, how maschotic
THE PALESTINIAN: a time-turner. we revert
into seas, salt preserving our bodies; souls hanging:
a speculative piece. they press their noses against our windows
what a view, two Palestinians fucking.

performance piece: THE PALESTINIAN WOMAN.
the history of [*archived*]. spatiality of orchids.
return of light. I am waiting for you, albi,
to throw the gas at the museum & liberate us. don't be
a coward. space cowboy, babe, I dream of the fire.

enough about the olive trees, I want to talk about
when you drag my hair across the street and proclaim
me as yours. left my body hanging in the window; Maryam never dies.
let the men see how you marked me. molotovs
and bruised inner thighs: THE PALESTINIAN MAN.
I want the violence, crave the fire. I promise, albi, I'm good
at screaming. throat splits land open,
like a good bitch.

the FUTURE. a *SOFT* love, the mountains
kissing hips, loz-skinned and olive-washed hair. isn't that
what we imagine? no missing skin or the sovereignty of fighter jets.
if I kiss a boy from Khalil and fuck one from Ramallah, what's left
for my marriage?
zawajj, zawajj. married into horror stories, I run
into the groves on-fire, I want to burn alive with my land
how foolish, another dead girl. I grow starved,
you demand my loyalty, I'm loyal to love.
the moon rises, full and you call my body *fertile*,
ready, how tragic you're not my revolution. tear down
the museums, unhang me, douse me in water.

fuck your performance piece, albi, I have no shame
if the whole city hears you fucking me, isn't that what you wanted?
primal, like how they draw us in their museums & exhibitions.
hymen between your lips, they want to see our blood.
performance piece, you eat me: THE VIRGINITY WA AL NOUR.
break the stained-glass windows, Shammout to paint us whole
take the exhibition, my body
stilled on your window, burning.

I asked if you'd make love to me when the war comes bas
the war is always present, its mouth at the windows
they step on our garden to reach us by foot, habeebi, do
you hear what I am saying? I am dying
for the violence, I desire the sea. bring me
to my knees, take the stones, bury the
windows. drag my hair across the shards, I heard
a rumor you own me. dip me in rose-water, I'll come out
the blushing bride: WEST BANK LOVERS. I want you
to unhang me, wash me, bury me. bring the gasoline, babe,
it's a party. will you touch me in this violence?

the war doesn’t bother knocking.
how tiring.
how many of Darwish’s lines will they paint on me? a statement piece,

our bodies contorted in unintelligible letters, *what a view!*
you’re a coward in love
with their gaze. I won’t drown
in the sea like a scorned lover, I want to hear you laugh again
habeebi, albi, I won’t give birth here.
west bank lovers: all I know are your eyes
let me down from the window, albi.
I am tired of being owned. let the air cool the children,
the rivers, the churches.
the glass tangled in my hair & your cock
on exhibition. you said once in secret you love me. I left
my lips for you to eat, will you leave me so unfulfilled? fool, habeebi,
al nour, al nar; *LIBERATION PIECE*, *west bank lovers*: all I know
are your eyes, my hands, the heat of the explosion

Rimona Afana

white

w h i t e

phosphorus blasts envelop the strip; charred flesh, eroded structures, blurred vision until the next commercial. As Buddha says, hic locus est ubi mors gaudet succurrere vitae. It is with great sorrow that we need to disclose she is alive still. Had it not been for his luxuriant beard, I would have had no refuge. Yet, we can now contribute a note to her prepostmortem honors, the email concludes. Among their funeral directors, this raccoon with a sesame-coated baguette instead of a baton, conducting a choir of hired weepers. We are not racist, but we feel circumspect about the hue of your meninges. You see, the standard round here is the nuance of our Queen's triple-filtered amniotic fluid. You suggest unscrewing my hand so you can keep it. Offers of dismemberment feel flattering once you pass a certain age. Overhead for the connoisseurs, the OSN-9 Reaper is now available for preorder. Better yet, you are automatically entered into our draw for a one-way ticket to the open-air slaughterhouse. Alternatively, you can join the drone's exploits for free in 9D in your local cinema. Our green Lord advises you do so. As Yair once warned me, finding holes in holiness precipitates adrenal fatigue. Your black belt's turning

w h i t e

Maen Hammad

The Mundane

Skateboarding is a critique of space.

One exists within it, eyes honed to their surroundings.
A gift, like a raven’s vision.

A vista and a “fuck you” to the pullers of the strings.

In Palestine, this occurs as a spatial critique of explicit and mundane violence. Explicit is visible violence:

Checkpoints as colonial arteries, night raids for fajr, physical segregation,
and a dispossession continuum. Over seven decades of high stakes necropolitics, the eyes water in apathy.

Mundane is ambiguous; unnoteworthy violence. The prevalent
and mainstream
garden variety of control.

Facial recognition cameras, biometric mining, apartheid tech,
mis/dis/information, a 21st century colonial gaze, and
cement horizons.

My eyes stare back, unblinking
at this architecture.

“Peace” plans and roadmaps to nowhere, the perpetuity of a multipronged and weaponized occupation, the kingdom of domination, the infinity of apartheid, and the cryptic illness

it infects to the imagination, which feeds back into life.

This all takes place under the radar, invisible to the untrained eye.
I get swept with feelings of anguish when I contextualize it.
The agony of not being able to show the magnitude and scale of injustice
that frame the present-day reality of Palestine
color the languish I insist to dismantle.

I am no longer a kid and there is no return to suburbia.

Jen Siraganian

Self-Portrait: A Second Version

I prefer tea to coffee, sleeping to waking. Maybe that's why my death seems innocuous. I wouldn't be American if my father wasn't a Palestinian refugee. I wouldn't have been born if he didn't hire my mother.

Unlike my mother, I'm not allergic to scallops, hazelnuts, or buckwheat. Unlike my father, I'm not an immunologist. He's useful during a pandemic. He helped Fauci buy a Bedouin rug. He could haggle. Of course, his Arabic helped too. I can't write a poem without dropping a name.

When Barbara Streisand walked through my dorm, I told her *The Prince of Tides* was the best film. I'm prone to hyperbole. Israel will never permit me to live in my father's house. That's not exaggeration. I can visit my grandparents' graves, but only for 90 days. Last summer, I didn't last two weeks. *Conflict avoidant*, my husband calls me. I prefer saying the country wasn't my cup of tea.

Kaleem Hawa

Learned Helplessness

I leave the pool, dripping and in my swim shorts, and I stumble around the lobby, eyes searching wildly, until the hotelier comes over with a question on his face, and I ask him what happened, and he shrugs and casts about for someone to dump responsibility onto, and his eyes land on a young Algerian porter, cute with curly brown hair, and he beckons him over and asks him to take care of the problem, and as we begin to walk away a Pied-Noir comes screeching over, informing me that a pubic hair has been found on a lady's shoe in the showers, and that after exhaustive analysis of the colour, curvature, and follicular circumference of the hair, she and the hotelier have deduced that it must belong to an Arab man, and that I am the only one of those in the hotel with access to the pool, and therefore that I must be a creep, stalking the women's bathroom, and before I can defend myself, the lights turn off and the birthday singing begins, and I give a laugh of relief!, and my friends all emerge, and so do my enemies, and their friends, and they shake my hand, each in turn, congratulating me on another year of life, and a table is wheeled out and on it is the cake, and one man, who I had fought with for so long, takes both my hands in his own, and embraces me, kissing my cheek, and whispering, "I forgive you, I forgive you," and all is well, and I eat my birthday cake, and I swim in the pool, and I forget the war.

Jessica Abughattas

Dinner Party

At the Chicago home of two of the film’s well-to-do backers, Irish
Catholics.
There was talk of the baby their daughter had adopted from Uzbekistan.
The trauma of not being held.
There are not enough women in the orphanages
to hold all the babies, so they put them in one crib.
The night outside was black
and I felt the chill inside my womb.
There was a closet to hang our coats.
The director, absent from the table,
is tense when his wife is on set.
The hostess took our coats.
They had a white dog four feet tall
with a coat you could find on a Bergdorf floor.
The Bulgarian washed vegetables barefoot.
When we embraced, she smelled my perfume.
“Look how beautiful your woman is!”
A remark about my collarbones.
There was talk about filmmaking in Occupied Palestine.
The trained fighters hired for security
ran off leaving the actors in combat.
They had to push the car through the desert.

The meal was decadent and the hostess pleasant.
There were collard greens, corn, a roast.
The hostess said they wanted an American feast.
And Jack with his white beard and iridescent teeth at the head of the table.
The Palestinian went out into the frost to smoke,
stepped in the tundra dog’s shit.
There was talk about the gentrification of Eastside Los Angeles,
the finest sushi in Little Tokyo.
The cinematographer requested roasted vegetables.
A rhubarb pie was served.
There was a large bowl of tropical fruit.
The wooded suburbs of Chicago
are so dark you could die
if a deer runs in front of your car.
The house was recently remodeled.
The Bulgarian actress pretty without makeup.
The director was off on a marital dilemma.
All the actors had spouses.
Instructions how to kiss, blocking
can make anyone fall in love.
There was talk about the promise
of the young director who sat beside me.
There were three Palestinians, two Irish, the Bulgarian.
The cinematographer was Chinese American.
The AD was white and gay.
The house was so big I got lost in the powder room.
It had been a tough night on set.
The scene called for nudity.
An intimacy coach was brought on set.
The director is having marital problems.
There aren’t enough women to hold the babies.
A letter arrived and I saw him smell it.

We smoke in frost and step in shit.
The Akita is angelic.
There was talk about the rental market.
A stucco Mediterranean
true to the Golden Age of 1920s Hollywood.
He’s a promising young man
who directs me.
I am a decent woman.
I have scandalized a few.
Everyone fell silent.
The rhubarb pie was served too hot.
The hostess was pleasant.
There was a coatroom and a remark
about my collarbones.
A decadent American feast.
The Palestinian fought off three men,
or so he says.
Being held is a trauma.
One crib held all the babies in Uzbekistan.
When we embraced, she smelled tropical.
Nudity was called for.
The Palestinian was humiliated.
A car could kill you in the dark.
Not while your wife is on set.
Washed face and barefoot.
It had been a tough night.
We held hands the whole way up the cobbled path.

Zaina Alsous

cinematography

Though I sell the rent of my body daily,
I still struggle with legibility, an abstract
Labor. Blue gray charcoal lines trace innominate bone,
Nipples with steel bars, a mere detail, a perk
Of a $30 figure drawing class. I am paid hourly to pose,
Moderating the distance between art and product.
Maybe this is what Marx means by surplus value.
Which does not explain the sensation of watching
My geometry against the page: a swell, a record.
Even Marx could not categorize every exertion:
Chopin’s piano notes, fragrant noise, salt-wet laughter.
What about YELLOW? Or the color of orgasms;
Non-productive conduits of else.
The space between price and lavender.
On my browser, an article about lost cinemas.
Two bulldozed in the West Bank in less than a year.
In the demolished projection room of Al-Assi, live
Remnants of yellow frames. Marx and this poem fail
To fully explain the action of workers watching film alive
Under occupation. Poetry and film survive as incomplete
Forms of description. A vaccine of distance.
To locate a self in study, is to chase an orchestra of the dead.

The summoning music often too faint, too far away
To tend to the tensions of work and seen.

Hala Alyan

Wife in Reverse

x.
In the old museum, we both avoid looking at the taxidermic display. The animal heart inside the animal chest.

ix.
Before the evening has ended, you have kissed each one of my knuckles. We
undress like suitcases opening after a long trip. In Nashville, in Spain, in the backroads of Georgia, when you start the car engine, my first prayer is for you.

viii.
You like to hear about the women in my family. They burn dinner. They divorce and suck their stomachs in. They love red coats and expensive perfume and, when the winter light fills the streets in that final, lonesome way, they will walk into a stranger’s life and make it their own.

vii.
If a girl doesn’t have land, then man becomes land.

vi.

Married, fogged. I would leave you. I would take all the blue pills. There would be no state hospital. We took a flight to skip winter. What I hated I hated in you.

v.
Honeymoon antibiotics. Heat like a long whistle, making a shelter out of leafless trees. When the chlorinated pool appears in the white crags, we use our bodies to catch light.

iv.
I've come to love your silences. I surrender myself like a ransacked city. You
take the nails but leave the hammer.

iii.
Things we talked about in courtship: superpowers, cities, what makes our fathers cry, the grandmother you hadn't met, how Palestine isn't a theory, love as binocular, love as fishhook, alcoholism.

ii.
Things we didn't talk about in courtship: night terrors, God, where we'd spend Christmases, abortion, how I love to be the last girl to leave the party, bulimia, what made your exes cry, narcissistic injuries.

i.
We won't forgive each other for the future. I see you pocket the pack of Camels but still ask if you smoke.

Rewa Zeinati

Rooms

1.
Some of us wake up
to rooms and brewed coffee
and the low clatter of spoons
filling up the kitchen
while the voice
of an elderly
pacing
the street below
our balcony
begs
allah
allah
allah
a drifting tune
till we no longer hear him.

2.
Here comes the fruit cart
selling tangerines like tiny fists.
Here comes the man who measures

the weight
of chestnuts only to burn them
on a low fire.
Everywhere, children
are breastfeeding other children.

3.
War within
earshot
and the sea
the size of our lungs
we choke on the bones of those
who drowned and never arrived
or never left/
/this Mediterranean overpass to
nowhere.
Sabah el khair are two words
of a prayer.
We used to think that refugees
were of one kind
and we never knew
that we were too.

4.
My aunt says a woman
is like the soil, like the land,
el maraa mitil el ard
giving back despite
the pounding of army
boots and the blue fists
of men on our skin.
Giving back in orange

groves and children
even though her body
couldn’t
her land lost
eighteen and forced to walk
the length
of exile to get here.

5.
Here the streets are stray
cats. The streets are gossip
in the mouths of men.
/Minarets creaking like
old forgotten beds./
You say these men kill
with their hands, their teeth,
their swords, this is the way
they open countries.
You say you have no
idea who their god is
and why
but you know exactly
how only some of us
wake up to rooms
and brewed coffee
to the low clatter of spoons filling up
the kitchen
like a cruel laugh in our chest—

Mohammed El-Kurd

Anti-Biography

I don’t believe in capitalism or socialism, or any ism that gives my mother a fuss.
—Jackie Braje

I am but my credentials, apparently,
in third person
in pretense.

I am but Jerusalem, too.
Published by way of
their remorse
snipers to my spine
bombs women children etc.

My apologies for the inverted syntax
I am reluctant to say what I write about:
I don’t know anymore.
The question is about the earth—
primates over prose

Most days I’m in psychosis spine to my storms

bait to my rage
tired metaphors.
I think identity is corny.
That would have enraged me at seventeen.
My current beliefs would have—
except for the rifles
we all agree on the rifles.

I am but the institution, the prestige, the watermelon.
Most of that poetry is theater over thunder.
Most days I’m pulling pythons off my ribs.

I don’t hope for much more than what my grandmother hoped for.
Most of the rest is مسخرة How do you translate مسخرة?
I am but all that performance.
Who took poets off park benches to put commercials for poets on
park benches?
Who took poets off my shelves to put pills where poets once were?
I won’t sit on a recliner
and pay $200 an hour
to make villains out of coffee stains.

I gulp metaphors without counting.
My poems become mosaics unintentionally,
messy rooms habitually.

A cluttered bedroom isn’t poetic
it’s melodrama.

I am but my love for my land, by the way,
I have chosen you, my homeland, in love and in obedience
in secret and in public.

In truth I’m ashamed of my dreams.
There are those who dream of seeing the ocean,
Palestinian men who saw grave before gravel,
the coffin before the coast.

Newspaper blank commissions:
“The Psychological Effects of Occupation.”
I have never once felt free anywhere:
not with the Jordanian passport;

not in Santa Monica, the American Tel Aviv;
not in New York, the American Tel Aviv;
not in Tel Aviv, the American Tel Aviv.

*

I am but my nostalgia,
my sick homesickness.
Bike through Brooklyn:
Jerusalem neighborhoods
Radio “Israel.”
This is a yearning for rage. I’m in Stockholm.

What else goes into a bio?
On Judgement Day, God asks your parents about you.
I am but my obedience to my mother.
رضاكي يا أمي
God said it, apparently.

I keep my secrets to keep her sane.

Not breaking cycles if that’ll break her heart.

She’s had a tough life.

These are her years to rest.

Maya Abu Al-Hayyat

Mahmoud

translated from the Arabic by Fady Joudah

Mahmoud could have been our son.
I'd have objected to the name
and, for family reasons, you'd have insisted on it.
We could have bought him a crib with a blue quilt
and hung spinning musical animals
to coax him to sleep,
could have stayed up all night for his first tooth,
experimenting with various formulas
because my breasts couldn't produce enough milk
for his voracious appetite.
And with a new Nikon camera,
we could have captured his first step.
And his verbal skills would have wiped the floor
with your niece's skills, of course.
We could have disagreed over his elementary school:
nothing wrong with public education, you'd have said,
and I'd have demanded a private one.
You'd have turned your face toward me
as you counted our few remaining dollars

to my wailing about balancing the budget.
We would have been happy,
his first school bag in one hand,
his other hand waving to the neighbor’s girl
before waving to us.
His teacher would’ve complained
as teachers are wont to do,
and we’d have called her names for her blindness
to the genius of our only son. Yes,
we would have bought him a battery-operated car,
built him a paper plane that doesn’t fly,
maintained his teeth white,
flipped his collar for coolness,
and he’d have loved me more than you
because of issues beyond my grasp:
your jealousy would’ve grown mysterious.
And when his voice changed he’d hate us both
and love the neighbor’s girl more.
Rumination would have haunted us
for hours at night. Our whispers
advising us to be patient, let go, observe
from a distance. Then you’d have lost your wits
over his first cigarette, the hidden pack
in the laundry room, but his tremulous voice
would prevent you from slapping him
with an open palm. You’d have forgiven him,
you’re kind like that. He’d only smoked in secret.
But the first rock he’d have thrown
at soldiers at the checkpoint,
to raise his heroic stock in Manal’s eyes,
would have declared war in our house:
biting followed by flying slippers.

Nightly debates wouldn’t have helped us
to core solutions. I’d have to carry him
between my teeth, fly him
from one neighborhood to another to shield him.
But he’d run away.
That would be who he’d always been.
A misguided kid who saps the heart and soul,
that’s who he was. Still you
were martyred eight years
before he was born, and he was martyred
eight years after you were gone.

—*Jerusalem*

Mira Mattar

from “Affiliation”

I was extremely inconvenient on the hundredth day of the, yes, revolution
bringing an ancient horror to the family gathering
where the word ‘thawra’ was being trialled
in opulent surroundings—
how a word can be feared
how that fear can be a desire
how a desire can be feared
not wanting to say it
yet
or wanting to say it
to make it truer in naming
or does naming only pin down (say *Palestine*, you must)
forty mages scratching the head of the tribe
three little dogs howling
eat yourself free
what a waste of a void
but no one stopped climbing into the streets
had I always been climbing from windows
waiting for friends to run with?
When a friend is nothing like you

but looking in the same directions
when a friend is not a category but someone to ask
what do we want with?
When a friend is often against you
honing what 'together' means and why
and where it begins
and that it ends
and in that ending grows
form
is not all muscle
but all of it is breathing

love big enough for everyone
to be separately angry about whatever they want
for as long as they need
which is the happiness that could be possible
if you are willing to have our own memories
if you are wise enough
not to conflate anger with aggression
there is your anxiety hounding you to the door
asking again and again
why can't I lift the weight of my limbs?
Do you really love me?
How do we make another world?
I am just standing in the kitchen!
I am just learning on my knees
in bathrooms internationally
that my submissiveness relied on the amnesia

upon which my popularity was built
fuck
I willed it
you, you are the one who can-
not remember
his dreams or the soldiers
the auntie you ran to escaping
the camps
the aeroplane, your father, the last boat, the old house
when the beginning of waiting to return in a month
began you sweet baby
of the family
mistaken for jolly
oh big bubble head balancing on some spine
I do not know how to have this condition
while riding the bus
trying to dismantle my nervous cathedral of self
while my lover severs my nipples
to use as chips to gamble with
I always loved an addict

so my own worries would pall
AQA, EdExcel, OCR, IBS, HMRC,
the Oxford comma, the 11-Plus, my budget,
my mother, yours, that fucking broken pipe
I retreat
into my secret longing
to be a carful of boys

high and speeding
in that royal blue Renault Clio
fast as possible away
from the irresponsible project of home
it's a world I want or out of it
I mean the distance from loneliness
that renders it meaningless—
a shell in your palm
important to have known
(to know how to be alone in the world)
but impossible to remember
its desolate winter beach
or how it could ever be possible again
for I have never been I
and you have never been you
and yet we are never we only
or ever could be always
a wild range of motion
in motion
driving down the finely tarmacked streets of
Wimbledon, Streatham, Earlsfield,
Tooting, Wandsworth roundabout
is an iconic superstructure smooth and silent
tulip heads
those little ginger biscuits from IKEA
ring pull cans of sweetcorn

[illegible] pull cans of sweetcorn
poking soaking rice
in a yellowing Tupperware, nicotine
sweating in bronze streaks

ach finding a boy
to put his fingers inside you— for freedom
instead of your own
finding a boy
to push you too young against a wall and liking it— for freedom
instead of your own
silver lit edges
of geranium leaves
your own lovely face
suddenly illuminated behind the lighter flame
at an underage party in Twickenham seriously
what do we want for us?
You and me, Teta, ketchup on our eggs
your hair growing back like a baby's
the last time I saw you in the hallway
falling half asleep
glasses on on purpose
because you love when she takes them off for you
and strokes the sublime planes of your face
occasional
DILFS of southwest London
salmon shorts, popped Jack Wills collars
on Clapham Common
happily congealing into the fantasy of a standard shag
their wives

their children I teach at big oak tables
lovely massive sofas
£60 cushions
clean windows
the coaster sticking to my cup
as I sip humiliating me
adopt me mother! Own me
I am your age now but you keep getting younger
I up my rate to prove it
tell me is home a certain place?
Doubt has a bad reputation

tell me where the beginning of discernment is without it,
the beginning of thought
the beginning of walking home with bare arms
in a summer made wholly of jasmines
tell me how to move from the desire which owns me
garottes me in my sleep
to the desire which moves you in a total direction
without the war inside
bamboo this way, that, water
dog, I like the cool grass on my bare back,
I love a few people very much
how do you end a circle?
Why do you fear a word?
It stokes the gap between your life and you
you are the baby too

and I wasn't making anything easier

tired, my bowels full of cotton
but I finally had the energy to climb over the fence
to contain my cockiness about sea swimming
because secretly I decided not to die anymore
(in Queen's Park of all places)
or to get off on slightly dying all the time
because secretly I decided not to
take the blame anymore
for somebody else's nightmares
or for their dreamless nights
or for the neoliberalisation
of the post-war Lebanese economy
being nine
realising one Barbie's cupped palm
fit perfectly over another's pointy breast
and that was my selfishness
and there was my freedom
and t/here was the gilded passport, and the

NHS, and the pavement that
does not just become a hole with a jagged metal pipe
sticking up out of it ready to cut you up
whenever
and t/here was the orthopaedic pillow, and the
good immigrant, and the mirage
of fiscal accountability, free travel
for pensioners and responsible redevelopment,
immense green spaces and hundreds of
homeless people in Lewisham, and another case of

homeless people in Lewisham, and another case of
mass abuse in a children's home, in the church,
in a care home, in the bowels of Parliament,
and t/here was no street crime but your wife
is yours to rape and the priest is yours
to bribe, and the Virgin is under my pillow, and
the mosque is outside my window,
and the beautiful shrine is between my eyebrows,

and t/here was not civilisation
when salvation is the subject of all history,
I'm here for the churches officer I swear,
and t/here was another pretty girl
sobbing in a Pret, and
26 honour killings last year in Jordan and 80 women
murdered by their male partners in the UK
between 2018-19 and 2 billion people on earth
living without basic sanitation facilities
and that is what happens when saying no becomes
a luxury revealing the lethal force
behind most options
watching you weep
you watching me weep
but never with a hand over my heart for My Country
I have none, I want none
what I want is never called nation
that bourgeois phenomenon

that end of imagination
a suckling son
even in that extreme case

where my baby heart whispers
I want I want I want
even in that extreme case
that shredded your father and mother
your sister and brothers
your foetal expression
the neighbouring nations
even in that extreme case
that ran into your children
sick with unknown unknown unknown
other other other
that cuts us up
and cuts between us
like a jagged metal pipe sticking out of wherever—
affiliation.

Mejdulene Bernard Shomali

Stone Heart

i say the stones marked an old tongue and it was called eternity
—from “mulberry fields,” Lucille Clifton

In Palestine a stone is a poem
held in two palms like communion or prayer

In Palestine a stone breaks open
to reveal an almond still soft

In Palestine a stone marks
the edge of the field where we should not trample

In Palestine a stone is the marker
of life after it is over

In Palestine my first boyfriend
carved my name into a stone

He wrote my name in English wrong
I wore the stone around my neck

I met him leaning against a car parked outside a church
In Palestine teenagers cruise each other outside churches

outside delis outside mosques In Palestine
I get cruised outside a church a deli a mosque

at school in Jerusalem before I am too old to be allowed into Jerusalem
I get cruised on a bus in a cab at the gates of the Old City

In Palestine I get cruised at a checkpoint

The guard is a teenage boy

He carries a rifle It is slung over his shoulder
I carry a backpack It is slung over my shoulder

He says “If you smile I will let you through”
I am 11 at the time but am told my chest makes me look older

He says “If you smile I will let you through”
I am 11 at the time

I say My smile is made of stones

I say My smile launches stones like a slingshot

I say The sky is raining with stones like birds

The checkpoints and walls and containers are exploding
The stones dropping drum eternity

The sky is raining with stones like birds

.
 .
  .
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    .
     .
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In Palestine a stone is the marker of life after it is over
a stone is a poem a communion a prayer

a stone marks the field where we should not trample
In Palestine a stone breaks open

It grows It blossoms

In Palestine a bird soars overhead

Carolina Ebeid

Punctum/Metaphor

Love remains a kind of present tense. This is how we describe the scenes in photographs—as though the actions in them were still happening. My father is throwing a rock in this picture. My father keeps lions in his chest & they rip apart a gazelle in this picture.

A man throwing a rock; the image holds an old grammar. This rock has yet to leave the hand, to measure the horizontal span from A to B. Nor has it completed the vertical distance from first line to last line, riding a tangle of syntax. The photograph captures a skirmish in the West Bank town of Nablus; the man hurling the rock is my father insofar as Juliet is the sun.

BEIT FOR TIME

Mahmoud Darwish

Don’t Write History as Poetry

translated from the Arabic by Fady Joudah

Don’t write history as poetry, because the weapon is
The historian. And the historian doesn’t get fever
Chills when he names his victims and doesn’t listen
To the guitar’s rendition. And history is the dailiness
Of weapons prescribed upon our bodies. “The
Intelligent genius is the mighty one.” And history
Has no compassion so that we can long for our
Beginning, and no intention so that we can know what’s ahead
And what’s behind . . . and it has no rest stops by
The railroad tracks for us to bury the dead, for us to look
Toward what time has done to us over there, and what
We’ve done to time. As if we were of it and outside it.
History is neither logical nor intuitive that we can break
What is left of our myth about happy times,
Nor is it a myth that we can accept our dwelling at the doors
Of judgment day. It is in us and outside us . . . and a mad
Repetition, from the catapult to the nuclear thunder.
Aimlessly we make it and it makes us . . . Perhaps
History wasn’t born as we desired, because

The Human Being never existed?
Philosophers and artists passed through there . . .
And the poets wrote down the dailiness of their purple flowers
Then passed through there . . . and the poor believed
In sayings about paradise and waited there . . .
And gods came to rescue nature from our divinity
And passed through there. And history has no
Time for contemplation, history has no mirror
And no bare face. It is unreal reality
Or unfanciful fancy, so don’t write it.
Don’t write it, don’t write it as poetry!

Emily Khilfeh

Al-Eizariya

What the Romans failed to understand.
It’s not enough to be dead. God plucked me
like a string & sheared the melody.
Your miracle. Your very own Mechanical Turk.
First egg, then sphere, then hen. Poor empty
hen. When I emerged like a whisper
the whole world strained to listen.
God claimed my land the way a pilot
claims his crash site.
No, it’s not enough to be dead.
My olive blood. My shortwave radio. My tomb.
I’m all bruised with holiness. Your want
a thumbprint in my pear-flesh.
I admit it. I love that I deny you.
An apricot harvest
with no apricots. My dimpled flesh
soiled & rotted. See here. My burial clothes.
My headcloth. My pitless eyes. You can dress up
in my effigy, but you’ll only ever be my ghost.
I love that what you steal still belongs to me.
Even your shovel thirsts for my grave.

Kaleem Hawa

Jericho II

with references to Isabella Hammad

It’s trauma theory for the televised era,
feasting on the sight of the women
cowering in their rubbled homes, and
the serious men, with their weapons of war, and
their cartographies of feeling!
But occupation is more a convalescence, an indigo bloom
that works slowly, seeping into a water
that fills the basin, hydroponic for the crops,
that washes the faces, Barbasol on a skin
now cleaned of its inconvenience!
And if acclimation is just another experience of death, then it is also cyanotrophic,
metabolizing our unease,
casting us about in search of our riverbed bodies,
the serious men noting *the stomach bloated, the neck a dark bruise-blue*,
confirming those solemn vows
to bury the houses amongst the ferns of the Jordan River

Sara M. Saleh

The Museum of Falasteen

after Katie Hale

The air is fragranced with fresh semsem ka’ak
and jasmine and I am waiting for my mother.

I am forever running early, hopping on train after
train, always toward something. The museum

is fluorescent and cool, and the past is distilled
and maintained for us. I don’t need a ticket

here, welcome—it’s free! the smiling woman
at the front door says, she can see I haven’t

been before. The tiled domes are handmade
and majestic, timeless as our ancestral lineage, shaped

in our image. There is simplicity, too, in the museum,
though the amount of calamity on display seems

deceptively complicated, and the ramp winds up

to floors and floors. From the peripheries, tour guides

rotate like planets, eager to assist, to tell of hero and of villain.
I am still adjusting to all our stories

made coherent, curated in a single structure. Sesame
seeds trail behind me like a dashed line on a map, but

there are cleaners to wipe up my mess. I am reading
Darwish in the cafe, where all the waitstaff are also

Palestinian, ‘am Mohamed from Jenin, from Haifa, from
Beit Lahm, and all the guests are from everywhere, and

none of us ask why they suddenly care after all this
time. Perhaps they want to be part of history in

the present, where our people are displayed up on
walls and in cases and at the back of the exhibition.

Nathalie Handal

Riflessi

Faces appear all along Zattere like a canvas of whispers.

On his way to Acre, Marco cuts the nights in half so none would last longer.

A cloud slides down his back.

He thinks, *Strange the way it tilts when the world is not looking*.

He says, *This is the mystery of the unsung tunes*.

A Moorish trader, a Venetian sailor, and a Byzantium priest wait for the waves.

On Ramo Calle Larga, my lover appears and disappears with the sunlight.

At San Nicolo dei Mendicoli, my grandfather, named after the saint, remembers yesterday sometime in the future.

He knows we often choose loneliness or the rain, faith or a country.

On the prehistoric vase, the believers and nonbelievers find different ways

to stay alive in the same empire.

They ask, *How do we prepare for our arrival?*

My mother’s smile still on the grounds of San Marco, she was twentytwo,
I was in her womb. It was winter.

On my way to the basilica, all the streets become Star Street.

On Rio Tera dei Pensieri, a piano plays paradise.

History arrives late.

The Mediterranean light arrives on time.

Suja Sawafta

Pompeii

Somewhere deep inside me, I know I'll die
the same way: a pile of self-consuming
volcanic ash. I ask a friend of mine to calculate
the algorithm of my salvation based on an intersection
of fates and furies. *Why are you asking me this*?

My grandmother is dying from cancer.
We have similar temperaments.
I never finished *Love in the Time of Cholera*, though I tried
to read it with my back pressed firmly against her legs, anchored
in the city that formed my periodic table,
a fourth of which came from her. I decompose
into a sea of poppies. She grabs the book from my hands, opens it
in the wrong direction, peering at the language
of her colonizers. She asks me if I ever try to read in Arabic,
if I will my fate to diverge from this genetic line.

Sito, can I still covet you in the ways I love most?

Angie Mazakis

Fulminations

From a balcony, from a jet ski, from the inside of a car until its windows shatter—when a bomb hits a port in Beirut, and there are videos on the internet from every angle, and it's felt in Cyprus, heard in the mountains, I call my dad in Indiana and ask if he's heard about it, because he has a TV in his room at the nursing home, and sometimes he forgets and leaves his TV on something he'd never watch for hours until his disappearing mind rides a wave of monotony to tedium to animosity and he calls me and asks where he is and says he wants to leave, and sometimes he hangs up in fulmination, but sometimes I hear the TV in the background and say that he doesn't have to watch QVC; the cowboy movies are on channel 157, and he says, *Thank you*, *Ang*, *nobody told me*, every time. I text my sister, *These are the shops on Hamra*, the windows all blown out of every store along the street, *This is where we bought shishas and brass ashtrays*, and she responds, *Oh shit*, and my dad later says that yes he heard about it, *habibat dad*, but that's all he says when what I expected was his usual devastated, *Oh my God*, after he'd see Beirut explosions every week on TV in the 80s, and the sparks would fly all the way to our house in Indiana and ignite his anguish, and now he's getting his lunch in his room and as we hang up I cringe at my own willingness to offer him devastating news that he'll forget anyway but might compound as ammunition in or against his heart. His new joke is that every time I ask, *How are you?* now he responds, *howarou*, *alright*, which in Arabic means, *They caused him an accident*, a week from now he'll fall

and crack his head open on concrete, the third time he’s cracked his head open (once I held it on the floor in our kitchen; I could barely deter the blood with the kitchen towel, flowing into the cracks in the tiles) and then he’ll have a grand mal seizure the next day, and when I facetime with him, his entire face will be black and blue and he’ll sound ok but then incoherent and I am grateful for all he has survived so far, lucky even—triple bypass, dementia, end-stage kidney disease, a hitchhiker’s gun, his car rolling over three times, the war of 1958, Nakba in Palestine. In the blast in Beirut almost 200 people died, and 6,500 were injured in an instant, and he has survived all of this. I hope they’ll forgive that I used the explosion—used it because I wanted to hear my dad call out, wanted to see him come alive another time.

Micaela Sahhar

The New Jerusalem

The night before the wedding in 1932
was never mentioned by direct descendants.

It is likely they had no knowledge
(for who would betray each fresh hell

that ushered their entrance). The incidents
not consecutive, this the second, despite

linearity in reconstruction from fragments.
It might have been worse than the *I don't*

love you (how could she, studious and
nineteen) after they were married. Had he

abandoned her to a boat, suspending his own
gone childhood for the ticket of passage two

Americans once wired to the Thomas Cook
agent beside the Jaffa Gate. Or for Switzerland

where adoption meant something quite else
to an heiress he drove to bathe at the edge

of Jaffa’s known universe. Strange feminist
stunt, her nieces learnt decades later how on

that long night she removed her bra
with ceremonial care on perceiving this

strap best equipped to replicate the act
in which a body might be hanged by the neck

until dead (common sight thought it was
on the Old City Walls). But this recollection,

after the scholarship she never accepted
was reassigned by the admissions at AUB;

after she arrived to Melbourne without
the length of her sister’s memories to

remind her of how it happened. The puzzle in
photographs saved (though serial conflagrations)

not one depicts that first day. How her granddaughter
recalls the way she leaned inwards

to listen, her smile deferred: the afterglow
of what after seventy years, she chose not to know.

Fady Joudah

Palestine, Texas

“I’ve never been,” I said to my friend who’d just come back from there. “Oh you should definitely go,” she said. “The original Palestine is in Illinois.” She went on, “A pastor was driven out by Palestine’s people and it hurt him so badly he had to rename somewhere else after it. Or maybe it goes back to a 17th century Frenchman who traveled with his vision of milk and honey, or the nut who believed in dual seeding.” “What’s that?” I asked. “That’s when an egg is fertilized by two sperm,” she said. “Is that even viable?” I asked. “It is,” she said, “on rare occasions, though nothing guarantees the longevity of the resulting twins.” She spoke like a scientist but was a professor of the humanities at heart. “Viability,” she added, “depends on the critical degree of disproportionate defect distribution for a miracle to occur. If there is life, only one twin lives.” That night we went to the movies looking for a good laugh. It was a Coen Brothers’ feature whose unheralded opening scene rattled off Palestine this, Palestine that and the other, it did the trick. We were granted the right to exist. It must have been there and then that my wallet slipped out of my jeans’ back pocket and under the seat. The next morning, I went back. With a flashlight that the manager had lent me I found the wallet unmoved. This was the second time in a year that I’d lost and retrieved this modern cause of sciatica in men. Months earlier it was at a lily pond I’d gone hiking to with the same previously mentioned friend. It was around twilight. Another woman, going in with her boyfriend as we were coming out, picked it up, put it in her little

backpack, and weeks later texted me the photo of his kneeling and her standing with right hand over mouth, to thwart the small bird in her throat from bursting. If the bird escapes, the cord is severed, and the heart plummets. She didn't want the sight of joy caught in her teeth. He sat his phone camera on its pod and set it in lapse mode, she wrote in her text to me. I welled up. She would become a bride and my wallet was part of the proposal. This had made me a token of their bliss, though I wasn't sure how her fiance might feel about my intrusion, if he cares at all. "It's a special wallet," I texted back. "It's been with me for the better part of two decades ever since a good friend got it for me as a present." "He was from Ohio," I turned and said to my film mate who was listening to my story. "Ohio?" she seemed surprised. "Yes," I replied quizzically. "There's also a Palestine in Ohio," she said. "Barely anyone lives there anymore. All of them barely towns off country roads."

Hajer Mirwali

Open Guide of Palestine

In Jerusalem, and I mean within the ancient walls,
I walk from one epoch to another without a memory
to guide me.

— Mahmoud Darwish

Before having been, I remember
returning to Al-8uds. Returning
in the present tense. I would love
returning. I am been returning.

Sand is falling through the mouth
in the fullest sense of the word:
already having fallen, waiting to fall
again. If business is getting better

we can be return for the first time.
In past tense once we are there. Sand
falling upwards like the Prophet’s
footsteps to heaven: we will returning

to 8uds. Inshallah we have returned.

Where a mother distanced closer to God
is trying returning her wedding dress with
the rest of her future memories. Reaching

checkpoints. Unlike sand, the full body
turnstile is locked for single-direction use.
Sometimes locked completely protecting
against all past present future attacks.

The mother her dress the father his lungs
filling with water all trapped on one
side of the throat long enough for the
hospital to get farther and farther away.

The mother's pregnant granddaughter's
10 cm dilation told to wait her turn
while the Soldier of Death! finds the
perfect space between two bars

of the steel barricade to stick his rifle
through. The baby is being born some
year between 1948 and now. She can
speak in two directions when allowed.

Welcome to the history of infinite security.
She is buying cashews in the sou2 on her
way to Masjid Al-A8sa. She is being
sleeping on the cold carpeted floor.

ARTIST'S NOTE:
Depending on

the Arabic you speak

8 is either
pronounced

or silent. The poem
dis/appears

Rasha Abdulhadi

The Dead Palestinian Father

the dead palestinian father takes up more space
than the living palestinian father whose poetry i miss—
his mix of southern idiom and the old jokes
about foolish kings and wise fillaheen.

the dead palestinian father hovers over every introduction:
if i am not wearing the kufiya, i am not naming him, and
if someone then compliments this scarf, i am a liar if i smile.

talking about the dead palestinian father successfully
ends every conversation, like an autopsy.

the dead palestinian father's autopsy was a crime
in which the GBI dismantled his body looking for state secrets.

to have a dead palestinian father is to do what he taught me
and what he taught me not to do: make home, risk everything.

to have a dead palestinian father is to think
if not for palestine, i would not be here, autostraddling nations,
if not for the (k)not-ing of palestine, i would have a father

who was impossible along much of his topography,
a terrain so treacherous he sought comfort only.

the dead palestinian father hangs warning over every indulgence:
chasing comfort can kill as surely as failure to care for wounds.

the dead palestinian father taught me to be flexible,
to survive a little longer, to be less brittle than he.

the dead palestinian father no longer stands as lineage intercessor
between strangeness and the family, he is no longer
reassuring them in the absence of photographic evidence.

to have a dead palestinian father is to have a dead palestinian grandfather
whose passing dropped a bomb in the ocean of his son's life
and rearranged the shoreline of his choices
in exile from a long line of dead palestinian fathers,
each a falling monument against their own era.

to have a dead palestinian father is to have good company
when I eat hot sauce, make hot sauce, and choose between
eight different kinds of hot sauce.

the dead palestinian father reads the news and argues
with the organizers I know even though they know more than he does.

the dead palestinian father comes to life in our dreams.
sometimes he's jesus dad and it's a miracle.
sometimes he's zombie dad and it's just a matter of time
before he tries to bite someone.

the dead palestinian father makes more sense
than the living father. no longer bound by the boards
of his body, his chapters read off into the horizon.

in death, the father becomes palestinian
as he could not be allowed in life, he flows over
and under like an aquifer, polishing the landscape where he passes.

the dead father belongs to us more than the living father:
when he made devotion to the lottery every week,
when he choreographed disaster on a kuwaiti oil pier,
when he filled a bare apartment with a palmstalk of banana,
when he ate two roast chickens after work every night,
when he stashed beer behind the AC vent in the control room at british petroleum,
beyond his refusal to join the risky recruitments,
beyond his refusal to kiss the king’s boot,
beyond his decision never to audition for egyptian television,
    though he was rated 10 for 10 in voice & looks—
the stories i don’t know slide into the horizon of the man who was,
and who could have been, and could be in the end, known only to himself.

George Abraham

Unarcheology of Father

a Markov Sonnet, with thanks to Fargo Tbakhi

Baba, I held your hand as you were dying
Half-asleep, floating between Unknowing
And here: your gazed fixed into the greying wall.

*

Half-asleep, floating away from an unknowable
Here, your gaze was fixed past the wall greying
from hospital to hospice to bedroom to heaven.

*

Here, your gaze was fixed. Past the wall, greying
from hospital to hospice to bedroom, the heaven
of your unforgotten youth played out before us.

*

From hospital to hospice, from bedroom to heaven,

Your unforgettable youth played out before us: 1967,
Summer whispering in the ferns, gator dead on the mantle.

*

You un-forgot your youth and let it play out before
Summer whispered the ferns dead. A gator on the mantle
Meant hunting season was beginning, its heat coming still.

*

Summer was a whisper. Ferns, dead on the mantle. A gator
Meant hunting season was a heat you named *beginning*:
This is how you convinced yourself you were *American.*

*

I wrote *heat,* and *beginning*, but meant *hunting season*.
This is how I know I am *american*: I can convince
Other men I am worthy of their roughest entries.

*

This is the shape of my knowing: I'm a convincing *american*
To other men who see, in me, a rough entry. A worthy
Hole would know when to submit, how to say *daddy.*

*

To other men, I am a rough entry, a worthy
Hole. I know how to submit, call *daddy*

Undeserving men: all spittle, teeth, and thrashing.

*

Hole I once submitted to, *Daddy* where once
Was undeserving man: in all the spittle and thrashing,
He was my first love, my earliest childhood friend.

*

When I was spittle & thrash, I thought myself undeserving
Of him. Being in love with my earliest childhood friend
Was how my body first taught itself to swallow.

*

I once was in love with my earliest childhood friend.
This is how my body first learned to swallow
the impossible wound of itself: summer quieted to whisper.

*

I first taught my body to swallow itself
As a wound scraped quiet on an impossible summer.
Baba, it was you who held my hand as I was dying.

*

I quieted the impossible wound of my body,
Baba. I held your hand while you were dying,
Half-asleep. I let you float off, Unknowing.

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh

The Camp Is a Bait for Time

With the shovel, my father reclaims the echo. Blow after blow until the wheat wakes . . .
The camp preserves its metaphors in the same way it shields its navel from the seen.
Navel: a scar to itself.
There, in the time that remains, camps raise their bodies as they raise their absence.
If it alludes to anything, it alludes to the inheritance of water.

Like her mother, my mother scythes dryness in her dreams.
When my grandmother left her village, she died for her mother.
My mother's only question: *Is dying, in the camp, history?*
To see the camp is to see its metonymies.
Only once his olive tree died, did my grandfather make himself a walking stick.
The proper noun, that is, what names, names nothing except the name.

The Camp is a Bait for Time.

Who testifies for who in the camp?
To testify is to occupy time verbally.
A custodian to itself it is: when survival is pondered by those in the camp, it is

necessarily pondered in the future.
The camp: a covenant between Man and time.
When time is killed, time alone can testify to its killing.
Where is the mouth apropos the testimony?
Can it be that mourning is the camp?

The Camp is a Bait for Time.

Between consciousness and its face, and with a stick as erect as his old back,
he would
say: *Leave me to it. Leave me to its time.*

I write the camp as it is suspended in the written. In the actual written it is not. Nor is
it in the absolute literality that suspiciously grasps the written.
I say: *Writing, like grasping, germinates the absent.*
What I write, I write for the disappearing hand, for the senility above, for what was a
season, or a lapse, for its looming return to life in its form, deformed.
I write to testify to my hand, to the limb in me, above all else.
The suspected fears of the absent.
For those who live at the pace of time, within the means of a dialect.
A dialect that will come late to their dry throats because of a looming air raid or the
imminent death of a passersby.
The thoughts that may wait to be picked off their well-bathed, dry bodies.
This is living, living as life in the future, as suspected time.

The Camp is a Bait for Time.

I am not sure if there is one Baddawi. Nor am I sure if there is life.

The camp is also guilty of the name.
For it is a secret at birth: it is a camp.

In the camp, a tense for the inactive in the air is benevolently called the future.
Is it complicity between time and its offspring or is it the camp left to its own time?

In traces, the subject fights with the subject.
For a trace to endure as a trace, a dissolution of all things must ensue.
Could writing be a trace?

What follows mourning is mourning to the extent that neither the
mourned nor the mourner
know who is who.

The gravedigger digs to bury and digs to see.
Seeing is a cradle to the unseen.
To dig is to justify digging with or without a reason.
He always digs from the edges. He says: *Dig not the inside! The edges eat*
into the inside until
no inside remains.
When dug, a hole is no longer a hole. Sublimated, revered and stuffed with its own innards, it
becomes a shrine.
In death, masks spit out their faces.
Rocked by the oncoming feet they die until another time.
Cemeteries in the camp are a discreet acknowledgment of that which is to come, in the sense
that he who dies is he who survives time.

The Camp is a Bait for Time.

In the first person I see the camp.
[The camp to my eyes. My eyes to the camp.]
A camp it will be, the indefinite in the definite, a covenant for the place, for time promised as anniversaries.
At every anniversary, my father remembers his face and forgets my mother's.
What my father remembers can and cannot be his face.
To this day, he reminds me that I fell off his back.
In his presence, I await myself to say what must be said.
Neither he nor I remember whose language it is we speak.

Dying substantiates dying. Straying while dying always grants the gravedigger more time to
widen his imagination.

Blame not a hand not knowing its hand.
In the camp, people die out of their time. Claiming the opposite, pronounce the camp a place.
This is not to say that the camp is other or unique as other: what is said is wholly said for the
ruins before and after the place.
In principle, the unique lies outside life.

Those who cannot see their limbs have not yet been born.
In my language, only the static is granted the right of birth and a father.
Even though waiting is premised on seeing, their eyes never meet.
We wait with no eyes.
Can the blurriness in a child's eye be the sacred?
The sacred is nothing but absence.
The forbiddance of narration, the forbiddance of quenching one's thirst.

I remember with all my might.

I remember, hands anticipating my fall.
I remember, drenched in guilt, marching back to the disaster, to the details of the dead,
with strict chronologies and smells.
I remember so I am alone, digging. Digging in the camp with my father’s shovel.
I remember my mother ripping out her hair in anticipation of the future.
I remember my hand stealing my mother from my sisters in broad daylight.

The Camp is a Bait for Time.

Sara Abou Rashed

No More Years of Nakba

Enough, enough with the names and numbers and maps, my grandmother’s birthplace is known only to her nose, her first gasp of life, in Haifa, the bride of the Mediterranean, known only to her bruise-blue eyes, the Carmel Mountain, after which a cousin of mine is named, known only to her bare feet, the orchards where she ran at three years old, full of oranges, known only to her small hands, to the rough lumber which grazed them in her father’s shop, to classroom tables and chairs he made, known only to children seated in schools but soon to be vacant metaphors for loss, to headstones, grieving mothers, and what resembles memory, what even memory would let go of, seventy-some years and thousands of miles away, when I ask my grandmother, a tape recorder in hand, what she remembers, my grandmother, now old and empty of answers, caressing her new American passport, says, “No, I can’t visit,” though she most certainly could; says, “No, I will not visit,’’ though I plead; says, “Why don’t you understand? I love Palestine as if it no longer exists…to me, it longer exists”—

Sharif S. Elmusa

Drawings

If you build a house,
keep it small, and the world large,
site it on a street merging with wider avenues.

Have the front face the river,
if possible, and the back the twilight.
Install in the ceiling the skylight of Horus,
for you to witness the auspices.
Dig a well
as deep as memory
as the mind can descend
without getting seized by vertigo.

Keep only a few things— light, as in travel—
enough to perform the daily rituals,
to warm the space between you,
make you feel sturdy.

If there’s no war, and you live in it,
it will stand. The great sound you will hear
is thunder resonating through the foundations

with ancient time, with the joy
of the sky. The western wind
will wash the walls with cooling rain,
and the northern wind change everyone’s color.
The secrets of the house will blow
with the breath of the sizzling garlic.

Don’t lock the door of the parents’ room
after they depart, they will still hear
the footfalls of the guests from miles away,
embrace everyone, coming and leaving,
under the arched gate, with triumphant air.

The children will be as happy as the pink bricks
in the facade, geraniums in the windows
and doves on the rooftop—
until they grow up, and breed
their own houses.

Ghassan Zaqtan

Everything As It Was

translated from the Arabic by Fady Joudah

What led him over there
in such cold weather?
Not longing or curiosity
but maybe fear or perhaps it was
the chill in the room,
though everything appeared as it was,
as he wrote in an old poem he could not finish

". . . Everything is still as it was
since we had gone out to war,
since childhood or before,
perhaps the sun of those years made the white curtains grow
fainter, and the pebbles
in the hallway become rounder
and shinier or the grass had grown longer
or dried up!

"The three mirrors are as they were
the sheets, the shelf

and the broom

“the family photo
the leather-bound Quran
the rosary of the deceased grandmother

“everything was as if nothing had changed.
Perhaps we
we who fell upon the war
from the school bell . . .”

That was the summer of 1986 in Damascus, his mother was still alive then and there was an opening somewhere in that poem, more like a hole that followed him, he’d hear it stumble behind him wherever he went, especially when toward the anxious endings in his dreams, and even there, they, the boys, would continue to stare at him and send out their perplexing gestures, the boys who did not return after the midnight patrols, and the dead who went back to sit on the doorsteps of their houses.

Now he feels a saunter in him through that opening,
without knowing exactly where it is,
and where the poem is, in its painful incompleteness.

Dampened with patience
overtaken by haste
he thought this kind of trickery
would befit the ending!

He could replace the “grandmother” with the “mother”
and observe
the disintegrating plaster above the door’s awning

the upside down chair
where the mallow flowers stumble and recover
without being nursed
and the gentle light through the back window
remains in its same old place.

Only the jasmine continued its climb, its eyes on the ceiling.

Islam al Khatib

One day the hauntings will stop

I sometimes walk around
pretending I’m back in time,
somewhere in the 1930s
then I jump to the future
a time hopper
in between cyclical memory.
I never think of myself in terms of the year I was born
but rather the year all was lost.
But then I smile and think of how I held my mother’s hand
a wall away from Palestine.
We knew we’d cross it.
In a silent language spoken
at a frequency that cannot be recorded
we expressed a belief that
one day,
I’ll return to my village, still in ruins
waiting
anticipating.
They didn’t even bother to replace us
they just removed us.
It waits.
My mother’s village also waits.

We are no longer waiting
We are running back in time,
Towards a future.
We sit with the ghosts.
We become the ghosts.
We haunt them.
We cannot be exorcized
but we can be excavated
we are deep underground while also hovering above.
We haunt them.
One day,
the hauntings will cease
and the echoes of a laughter heard in the 1940s
will transport me beyond the walls, beyond worlds.

PALESTINE IS A FUTURISM

Veera Sulaiman

Manifesto

We demand a world, with many worlds in it
A world of the anthill
A world of women harvesting jocote
A world where the stave churches crumbled long ago from lack of use
A world where Majdel's looms are still threaded
A world of your mouth
A world of our word
A world where it is kept
A world of flutes at dusk
A world of The Lovers and The Tower
A world of the three lines on your chin
A world where the stone point cuts them in
A world of persons without a single "it"
A world of the tree fungus trade
A world of listening to comets
A world of the Passenger Pigeon
A world of glaciers accruing ice inch by inch
A world of the oak savannah
A world where you read my future from sweet coffee grounds tipped upside down each morning, as we lay, side-by-side under the moose hide
A world where we pay the dirge singers for their service carrying sacks of wheat like grief

A world where you and I can live together
in your house un-razed, on the hillside at the fish camp, in the circle of our tents, the central house with all the food and children where the men do not sleep
A world of our dead fed
bear grease and cacao and a little blood from your palm cut open and water from the holy well

A world of our babies fed
from whatever breast
is closest to the mouth

A world

we demand

a world

This poem references The Zapatista phrase, "Queremos un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos," as well as specifically Tolow Dee-ni' and Armenian traditions.

Samih Al-Qasim

He Whispered Before He Took His Last Breaths

translated from the Arabic by Nazih Kassis

هَمسَ قبْل أن يلفُظَ أنفاسَه الأخيرَة

لا تُمجِّدْني بِتمثالِ رُخام وَنَشيدْ
فأنا أوثرُ من بينْ الأناشَّيدِ الحَزينَه
حُزنَ أمّي . . .

لا تُمجِّدني بغارٍ وَطُقوس مَلكيَّة
جَبهَتي تُؤثِرُ مِن بَين الأَكاليلِ الطَّريَّه
كَفَّ أمّي . . .

لا تُخلِّدْني بِمَنْح اسمي لِميدانِ مَدينَة
أوْ لِبُستانٍ عُمومِيٍّ،
وشارِع،
فأنا أوثِرُ أن تُغرَسَ باسْمي
كَرْمَةٌ،
تُصبِحُ كَرْمًا . . . فَمَزارِع!

لا تُخلِّدني بأن تَخطُبَ باسْمي كُلَّ عـام!
فأنا أوثِرُ أن تَخطُبَ باسْمي
آلةٌ جيِّدَةٌ تَنبِضُ في بَعْضِ المَصانِع!

قُل لأمّي،
قُل لما تَغرِسُ باسْمي
قُل لآلاتِ المَصانِع،
إنّني أحْبَبْتُ، من قلبي، الحَياةَ،
ولذا،
أَلفُظُ أنْفاسي،
قَريرَ العَينِ قانِع!

He Whispered Before He Took His Last Breaths

Don’t honor me with a monument
And song!
Of all the sad songs,
I prefer my mother’s sadness.

Do not pay me your last respects
With laurel and a royal display!
Of all the tender wreaths
I prefer my mother’s palm!

Don’t eternalize me by giving my name
To a city square
Or a street and public garden!
I’d rather a grapevine be planted
(In my name)
And grow into a vineyard and farms!

Do not preserve my memory
By giving a speech each year in my honor!
I’d rather a fine machine
Pounding away in a factory
Speak in my name!

Tell my mother—
Tell what you plant in my name,
Tell the factory machines,
That I loved life, from the bottom of my heart,

And therefore, I take my final breaths,
At peace and happy. . .!

Ibrahim Nasrallah

Palestinian

translated from the Arabic by Huda Fakhreddine

I was silent and nothing came of it.
I spoke and nothing came of it.
I cursed, I apologized, and nothing came of it.
I was busy, I pretended to be busy . . . and nothing.
I sat, I walked, I ran.
I shivered and I warmed up. Nothing.
I was parched until I cracked. I drank until I drowned, and nothing came of it.
I crumbled like a fetus, like the father, the siblings, and the mother.
I was then gathered in a shroud made of old curtains,
and nothing came of it.
I stumbled more than I could stand but then I stood up,
and nothing came of it.
I prayed until, like a prophet, I became a verse in a holy book,
I rowed until I reached hell,
I beseeched and begged . . . and nothing.
I raged, I calmed, I remembered what was once distant,
and I forgot what was always close.
I befriended a monster, and I fought a monster.
I died young and sometimes survived.

In both times, I grew old from all that I had seen,
but nothing came of it.
I charged, I withdrew,
I fought the wind when it blew,
And reconciled with the waves when I rose and raged.
Among the horses my heart was a horse,
in the night my heart was a night,
and nothing came of it.
I ate, I hungered, I vomited, and nothing came of it.
I embraced my shadow, and I chastised it and then I chastised myself.
I greeted a woman lost in the streets.
I fought with a man and his smile nearby,
and with a bird that sang briefly in the garden,
and nothing came of it.

I closed all the windows in my house and opened them.
I wrote words on death when it is merciful,
death when it is futile,
death when it is hell,
death when it is the only way . . . at last,
death when it is gentle and light,
death when it is heavy and dark,
and nothing came of it.
I wrote about the river and the sea, about tomorrow and the sun,
and nothing came of it.
I wrote about oppression and depravity— purity too.
I slept without a bite of bread.
I dreamt without dreams.
I woke up not missing my hands or feet or reflection in the mirror
or the thing I call my soul.
I died and lived. I lit myself on fire. I put myself out with my own ashes,
and nothing came of it.

I am all these elements, O God: fire, earth, wind, and water.
Their fifth is a pain that blind songs can’t see, their sixth is this immense loneliness, and their seventh, since my slaughter, is blood.
When I burned, I inhabited the letters of my free name like a butterfly:
P A L E S T I N E
When my roof was suddenly blown off into the sky and with it a wall, a window,
and the youngest of my children,
I gathered myself in the G and the A and the Z and the A.
I became GAZA.
A thousand warplanes circled and hit me. I collapsed and collapsed again, and then rose in a scream. I called out, but nothing came of it.
Nothing came of it.
Nothing came of it.
I lost faith and believed, lost faith and believed again,

and lost faith and believed and . . .
nothing came of it,
nothing came of it.

And the filthy world asks me:
All this . . . what of it?

Mohammed Khader

Between the Rivers and the Seas

The only land I’ve ever known tried to swallow my people whole.

Between the Mighty Mississippi and the Gulf
is a land of those who made it
from hell and back
to see the other side of the Middle Passage,
where they intended us to never leave.

Far from the place their heirs
first put us in shackles and chains,
relegating us from statesmen
to discardable cargo,
we were forced across the threshold
at the Door of No Return.

Each plot of land they forced us to dig,
at the behest of the King
to build the foundations of their sovereignty,
was another inch closer
to our eternal resting place.

Many followed the drinking gourd
in search of the other side of the Jordan.
Others were down by the riverside,
wading in the water,
and laying down their burdens.

Millions punched their tickets to go up north,
as bodies hung, swaying
above the blood-soaked soil
where the Poplar Trees
that bore strange fruits stood.

In Beartown is where our freedom was planted
by Hiram Sr. and Marcella,
as the world began to panic
months after the Great Crash.

His seeds blossomed like fruits of the spirit:
Hiram Jr. became a patriarch;
Israel carved his name in stone
with Hamer next to Moses.

The sharecropper that gave birth to a nation
before the nation ever claimed them
lived up to his namesake, of a Phoenician king—
full of knowledge and wisdom, exalted.

In the fields of rural Mississippi
where their heirs tried to bury our ancestors
is where you can find the prayers of the enslaved,
whose dreams of freedom carried us to the mountaintop in search of the

promised land where the King’s and the Evers’ rest.

On the other side of the world,
where history was first forged,
are a people cut from the same cloth,
woven into the fabric of their land like tatreez.

Between the River Jordan and the Great Sea,
where the enslaved dreamed of their freedom to be, is the land my people
on the other side of the tree
have belonged to since the beginning of eternity.

In the shadow of the Mountains of Fire
is where our tree was planted
until it was uprooted after the Mandate
by those who continue do everything
to ensure its seeds never blossom or return.

By land and by sea is where our families
were forced to flee this ongoing catastrophe
that turned an entire society into refugees
and forced cruelty on those who refused to leave,
including the many who held onto their keys.

Decades after the setback that forced our people
to reside behind the separation wall under lock and key, I finally found my
way to the place my ancestors planted their seeds
in Palestine, where the caged birds still sing.

Between many worlds and me,
between two rivers and two seas,
is where I was meant to be,

among the dispossessed
and of those who survived the sea.

Until liberation and return,
on the frontlines of wherever we are, and
in search of the lands that have always known
where we belong.

Zaina Alsous

Cento, of Women in the Sun

for Dareen Tatour and Red Fawn Fallis

Living in the earth-deposits of our history
I have seen more commands of men

than I have seen the sky itself.
have tried to keep my throat gurgling like a bird's.

Not a time for mouth, but still gaped open.
Everyone is dead. now. says, the ghost. The mom

is a yard of blackening petals.
We see the empire rising.

Search her!
Root out the explosives.

We howl our inborn call:
What will the yellowing tree bear?

I want to call this, life.

But I can’t call it life until we start to move

beyond all this pretense about gods
and the death of the land!

Crucial to finding the way is this:
there is no beginning or end.

A woman has a window
in her face: that is the truth.

when the war is lost
when the engine will die

was the cause was the remedy
was the record was the perils was the want

Poetry is elsewhere!
Far from rhymes, complaints, tradewinds

and parakeets. We made a new map
from breath from zone to zone.

Todas las armas al pueblo
Todo el pueblo al sueno

Eye look twice, and I eye
alight again.

Lena Khalaf Tuffaha

Letter to June Jordan in September

I cannot pass the anniversary of that first news event of childhood without returning to your poem. How from my house I watched. And watching, watched my grief-stricken parents unable to speak. How I leaned into the screen, the chords of the cries, searching for what was recognizable of fingers and thighs, of bracelets and moustaches. Macabre arrangement of bodies with names like our own. I cannot pass without your words. Something about witnessing twice removed. About distances magnified by the shift into language. Of dailyness and my own children's vernacular and the machine. Grinding us all in its jaws. I met a girl from the camp at a reading in Beirut. She asked if we could talk about the life of poetry. Our families are hauled off to the world of the dead and every day it is on screen. In Gaza we're watching Ferguson and in Atlanta we're watching Jerusalem watching Minneapolis watching. Their weapons and their training programs indistinguishable. The word *almost* flickers for a nanosecond. Here I note the shelf-life of selfcensorship, legacy of our era. Some days poems are scrawled on pieces of cardboard and carried on our shoulders at the protest like martyrs. Here I should say something about hope. Here I should say something about living.

Mosab Abu Toha

On Gaza Seashore

I convince myself that a palm tree never bends,
nor do its dates rot.
I imagine the sky only occupied by birds
and swollen clouds.
I walk alone along the beach and never fear getting drenched
by the cold, silent waves.

Should you find me asleep, be sure I am either
dreaming of roses and doves or staring into the void
beneath me.
I will dress in my rosy suit and walk to the port,
even though I know no ship is arriving.
My hope is that you will come flying to me
on your tireless wings.
I will collect seashells and pebbles to build a house
for us on the beach until you come.
I don’t know how many houses I will have built
before you come.
I’m afraid I will rebuild Gaza by then.

Samer Abu Hawwash

From the River to the Sea

translated from the Arabic by Huda Fakhreddine

every street, every house, every room, every window, every balcony, every wall, every stone, every sorrow, every word, every letter, every whisper, every touch, every glance, every kiss, every tree, every spear of grass, every tear, every scream, every air, every hope, every supplication, every secret, every well, every prayer, every song, every ballad, every book, every paper, every color, every ray, every cloud, every rain, every drop of rain, every drip of sweat, every lisp, every stutter, every yamma, mother, every yaba, father, every shadow, every light, every little hand that drew in a little notebook a tree or house or heart or a family of a father, a mother, siblings, and pets, every longing, every possibility, every letter between two lovers that arrived or didn't arrive, every gasp of love dispersed in the distant clouds, every moment of despair at every turn, every suitcase on top of every closet, every library, every shelf, every minaret, every rug, every bell toll in every church, every rosary, every holy praise, every arrival, every goodbye, every Good Morning, every Thank God, every 'ala rasi, my pleasure, every hill 'an sama'i, leave me alone, every rock, every wave, every grain of sand, every hair-do, every mirror, every glance in every mirror, every cat, every meow, every happy donkey, every sad donkey's gaze, every pot, every vapor rising from every pot, every scent, every bowl, every school queue, every school shoes, every ring of the bell, every

blackboard, every piece of chalk, every school costume, every mabruk ma ijakum, congratulations on the baby, every y ‘awid bi-salamtak, condolences, every ‘ayn al-? asud tibla bil-’ama, may the envious be blinded, every photograph, every person in every photograph, every niyyalak, how lucky, every ishta’nalak, we’ve missed you, every grain of wheat in every bird’s gullet, every lock of hair, every hair knot, every hand, every foot, every football, every finger, every nail, every bicycle, every rider on every bicycle, every turn of air fanning from every bicycle, every bad joke, every mean joke, every laugh, every smile, every curse, every yearning, every fight, every sitti, grandma, every sidi, grandpa, every meadow, every flower, every tree, every grove, every olive, every orange, every plastic rose covered with dust on an abandoned counter, every portrait of a martyr hanging on a wall since forever, every gravestone, every sura, every verse, every hymn, every hajj mabrur wa sa’yy mashkur, may your hajj and effort be rewarded, every yalla tnam yalla tnam, every lullaby, every red teddy bear on every Valentine’s, every clothesline, every hot skirt, every joyful dress, every torn trousers, every days-spun sweater, every button, every nail, every song, every ballad, every mirror, every peg, every bench, every shelf, every dream, every illusion, every hope, every disappointment, every hand holding another hand, every hand alone, every scattered thought, every beautiful thought, every terrifying thought, every whisper, every touch, every street, every house, every room, every balcony, every eye, every tear, every word, every letter, every name, every voice, every name, every house, every name, every face, every name, every cloud, every name, every rose, every name, every spear of grass, every name, every wave, every grain of sand, every street, every kiss, every image, every eye, every tear, every yamma, every yaba, every name, every name, every name, every name, every name, every name, every name, all . . .

Summer Farah

PORTRAIT OF ME AS BREAD BAKING IN JERUSALEM

I WAS THERE! I WAS THERE! I WAS ALWAYS
THERE! A BALL OF DOUGH INFLATING
UPON THE SAJ UNTIL IT FALLS INTO WARMTH.
I WAS THERE! A BREAKFAST LAID OUT UNDER THE
OLIVE TREES AFTER AN EARLY MORNING HARVEST.
I WAS THERE! FILLED WITH SALTY CHEESE WHILE
FISH BOB FOR WATERMELONS IN THE ICY LAKE.
THERE, BY THE CHURCH IN ICRITH, TO SERVE
ALONGSIDE FIGS, TREES NEVER PREDICTING
THEY WERE SOON TO BE ORPHANED. I
WAS THERE! LEFT ON THE TABLE NEXT
TO STILL-WARM CUPS OF TEA, THE SHUFFLE
OF KEYS BEING STOWED. I WAS THERE,
SETTLERS SETTING FIRE TO LAND. I WAS THERE
TRUNKS FALLING TO SOOT. I WAS THERE,
EARTH MOURNING THE BODIED ASH.
I WAS THERE, A PEOPLE DISPOSSESSED.
I WAS ALWAYS THERE. I AM ALWAYS HERE.
THE FIRST MADE ALONG RIVER BANKS, GRAINS
OLDER THAN SETTLER THAN STATE THAN TANKS

THAN BORDERS THAN BOMBS THAN
BRITISH THAN EMPIRE & STILL
NEVER LEAVE THE HANDS THAT MAKE ME!

Lina AlSharif

Afterlife: A Palestinian Narrative

a heart lives
to a full death
we say *asphalt, literarily asphalt*
coffins interrupted martyrs pickpocketed
a corpse kept in a fridge with juice boxes and fat olives
but only soil frees from grammatical tenses

under a tree shades are prayers where
you can ask Allah for anything
his nationality or a nationality and pray
your eyes hands tongue
not to speak ill of you
changing the subject is never like blowing a dandelion

after the sky is smoke the mountains are glitter
and jugs of water are springs
I imagine we all will be gathered in a stadium
on that day they say we forget our beloved ones
I will try to remember that it is the first time
there are no borders

Mira Mattar

from “And most of all I would miss the shadows of the tree’s own leaves cast upon its trunk by the orange streetlight in the sweet blue darks of spring”

bird lungs burn
tiny sleeps the
elevator brain
cords shaft & tremble
city razed again
dream incubated luxuries
blaze & gasp & char
of library kids of Beita
dazzle settlers
with fires flares & lasers
headlights phone torches
stripe their nights to
sleepless mirrors
hallucinating nation

*

inessential
dream to be
‘Palestinian’ is
a position no
an orientation no
it is the whole
compass no
it is the stars
themselves no
it is the way
I’m going no
it is the way
to go no
it is the way
to stay no
it is the way

*

blue wolf
watches
every dream
spoon melt
& twist
the sun
within its
hollow bowel
to madness
no rest
inside what
watches
no sleep no

sleep my
darlings

Noor Hindi

The World’s Loneliest Whale Sings the Loudest Song & Other Confessions

I won’t make metaphors out of fish. If I have to die, I choose the ocean. If I have to live, I choose you. You: Everyone I’ve ever mourned. I believe less & less of sunlight these days. I won’t die alone. To awaken crying is to awaken displaced. Ghost of your joy in the bathtub. A face in the mirror. Your nephew’s painting in the foyer. My mother cried in bedrooms growing up. I would study her for hours. In a study, researchers learned patients who cried less are likely to have dismissive attachment styles. Today, every bedroom in the house is mine. I stopped crying at age 12. As a child, I spoke a language no one understood. Research suggests loneliness increases cardiovascular disease. When my cousin died, she died alone. When the world collapsed around Darwish, he wrote of coffee and sex. When you held my body close to yours, I thought of clementines, sweet citrus, all the world’s lemons we’d temper with honey. The world’s loneliest whale sings the loudest song. This is what you’ll tell me the first time we meet. And I’ll think about the ocean. And I’ll think about you. I never learned how to swim. I’ve been drowning my whole life. Studies suggest drowning lasts 1-3 minutes. But I’ll never stop grieving. Scientists are still searching for the 52-hertz whale. But I swear he’s here. In my bedroom. And I can hear him. And he’s telling me I can stop.

Fargo Tbakhi

Palestine Is A Futurism: Prophecies (Cruising Jerusalem)

MIRACLEMAKERS
WE TOUCH HEAVEN WITH OUR TOES
HEAVEN LOOKS LIKE US!

WE BUILD OUR OWN FUTURES
WE BUILD THEM TO LOOK LIKE US

NO SOFT POWER OVER “US”!
RADICALLY WE DEFINE WHAT IT MEANS TO BE “US”
OUR SLINGSHOTS ARE A COLLECTIVISM
OUR FISHNETS ARE A NOSTRADAMUS!

RETURN IS A FUTURE IS A PAST!
THE PAST IS A FUTURE WE RETURN TO!

SUNSPOT TASTERS WE RHIZOME
SCIENCERESISTERS WE HEX THE WORLD

ONLY THE END OF THE WORLD FOR US
ONLY THE BIGGEST “US” WE CAN BUILD

IN THE LAND OF NO STATES I WILL LICK YOUR EYEBALLS!

IN THE SLEEP OF NO DOCUMENTS I WILL KISS YOUR IRIS!

THE SOIL RETAINS ITS IDEOLOGIES
THE SOIL TURNS THEM INTO BATATAS

CITY WALL LEAN AGAINST I STROKE YOUR STUBBLE!
TUNNELWALKERS WE DISSOLVE ANY MILITARY!
AN UNDECLARED END TO ALL DECLARATIONS!

THE SUN HAS SET ON THE BRITISH EMPIRE
ON THE AMERICAN EMPIRE
ON THE EMPIRE OF GOLDMAN SACHS!
ON THE EMPIRE OF MILITARY CONTRACTORS!
ON THE EMPIRE OF EVICTIONENFORCERS!
ON THE EMPIRE OF HUNGERCONSULTANTS!
ON THE EMPIRE OF SECURITIZATION!
ON THE EMPIRE OF POSSIBILITYEATERS!

INSIDE A POEM WE FOUND A TUNNEL
INSIDE THE TUNNEL WE FOUND OURSELVES

WE LIKED OUR TASTE!
WE TASTED OUR COLLECTIVISM!
WE REMEMBERED THE LAND WAS ALREADY A MARXISM!
WE REMEMBERED OUR NAMES AND THE ART OF MAKING NEW ONES!

LAY DOWN YOUR ARMS AND I WILL LAY WITH THEM
MAKE ME THE STRINGS OF A GUTTED PIANO
I WILL WRITHE AND MAKE THE SONG OF OUR ONLY NATION
RETURN IS AN ONTOLOGICAL DANCE STEP!
THE BIRDS ARE TEACHING US TO STAY!
FUTURE IS A DIRTY BATATA

EVERY DAY WE ARE SAYING NO TO THE THINGS THAT KEEP US APART!
EVERY DAY WE ARE SAYING NO TO ENCLOSURE!

EVERY DAY WE ARE CRUISING JERUSALEM!
EVERY DAY JERUSALEM IS CRUISING US BACK!

PALESTINE IS A FUTURISM!
FUTURISM IS AN EXPANSIVENESS OF UNDERSTANDING
FUTURISM IS A DEMOLITION OF MONUMENTS!

FUTURISM A RIOTING CACTUS
PALESTINE A RELATION OF LOVELINESS!

FUTURISM IS A PALESTINE!
PALESTINE IS A SYSTEM OF CARE!
CARE IS A FUTURISM OF HANDS!
FUTURISM IS A PALESTINE!
PALESTINE IS ALREADY HERE!
PALESTINE IS ALREADY EVERYWHERE!

ENDNOTE

I wish to talk about love. I wish to talk about abundance.

Palestinians are persistent and our endurance is rooted in tenderness, in community.

I love us most when our language is inside my belly. I love us most when we are together—physically—and within the intimacies of these pages. I love us most with our arms linked around each other, our heartbeats in sync, our bodies in movement towards a future that is free.

It is April 2024. I imagine our fate. I try to arrive, in the words of leena aboutaleb, to "a *SOFT* love," one with "no missing skin or the sovereignty of fighter jets."

I try to celebrate us despite "the funeral air of burned / children" to quote Deema K. Shehabi, who reminds us we are all, collectively, "in the witness seat."

I try to continue the work of living, which is easiest when loving, which is easiest when seeing each other in the expansiveness of what it means to be Palestinian now.

Within this anthology, George and I attempted to capture that breadth and depth—our joy, our grief, our despair, our fear, our brilliance, and our strength. We attempted to elevate a community that, though scattered in different parts of the world, is as beautiful as it is resilient.

Our contributors, living in Australia, the United States, the U.K., Canada, Palestine, and elsewhere, carry Palestine “in the joy / of the sky” (Elmusa). We insist, as Summer Farah writes, that:

> I WAS ALWAYS THERE. I AM ALWAYS HERE.
> THE FIRST MADE ALONG RIVER BANKS, GRAINS
> OLDER THAN SETTLER THAN STATE THAN TANKS
> THAN BORDERS THAN BOMBS THAN
> BRITISH THAN EMPIRE & STILL
> NEVER LEAVE THE HANDS THAT MAKE ME!

This is what this anthology is. It is insistence, it is community, it is survival, it is reckoning. As editors, we held these poems for many years, in weekly phone calls that kept us up past midnight. Together, we read over a thousand poems from our global community, from books we selected to read together to open calls our people so brilliantly responded to. We would recite our favorite poems aloud together to feel their words in our bodies before making final decisions. We needed to experience this fullness, allowing their music to carry our spirits beyond the page and into the work we do in our communities.

We celebrate these poems because they are poems of survival and abundant love. We celebrate our contributors and the bravery it takes to claim, reclaim, and bear the weight of writing about Palestine during excruciating circumstances and ongoing, historical, and concentrated attempts to silence us. We mourn brilliant writers like Refaat Alareer and Heba Abu Nada, who were murdered by the Zionist regime, but whose words continue to inspire us.

We hope, in the words of Lina AlSharif, “When / we are free, / this land will know peace / the poem will be complete.” Until liberation, we hope this anthology provides the rage, love, and kinship we need to continue resisting in big and small ways.

—Noor Hindi, with George Abraham

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Sarona Abuaker, *Why So Few Women On The Street At Night* (the87press, 2021)

Maya Abu Al-Hayyat, *You Can Be the Last Leaf: Selected Poems* (trans. Fady Joudah, Milkweed Editions, 2022)

Jessica Abughattas, *Strip* (University of Arkansas Press, 2020)

Mosab Abu Toha, *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear* (City Lights, 2022)

Rimona Afana: “white” was turned into an electroacoustic composition, featuring Afana’s vocal improvisations, by composer Adam Mirza. It premiered at his recital at the Schwartz Center for Performing Arts (Atlanta, 2019). Later the piece was presented at music festivals and composition conferences in New York City, Charlottesville, Marseille.”

Zena Agha, *Objects from April and May* (Hajar Press, 2022)

Ghayath Almadhoun, *Adrenalin* (trans. Catherin Cobham, Action Books, 2017)

Ahmad Almallah, *Bitter English* (University of Chicago Press, 2019)

Samih Al-Qasim, *Sadder Than Water* (trans. Nazih Kassis, Ibis Editions, 2006)

Zaina Alsous, *A Theory of Birds* (University of Arkansas Press, 2019)

Hala Alyan, *Hijra* (SIU Press, 2016) and *The Twenty-Ninth Year* (Ecco, 2019)

Zeina Azzam, Art Is Not Optional (art exhibition catalogue, Al-Quds Gallery, 2020); *Some Things Never Leave You* (Tiger Bark Press, 2023).

Mahmoud Darwish, *Why Did You Leave The Horse Alone* (trans. Jeffrey Sacks, Archipelago, 2006) and *The Butterfly’s Burden* (trans. Fady Joudah, Copper Canyon, 2007)

Najwan Darwish, *Nothing More to Lose* (trans Kareem James Abu-Zeid, NYRB Poets, 2014) and *Exhausted on the Cross* (trans. Kareem James Abu-Zeid, NYRB Poets, 2021)

Carolina Ebeid, *You Ask Me to Talk About the Interior* (Noemi Press, 2016) Olivia Elias, *Chaos Crossing* (trans. Kareem James Abu-Zeid, World Poetry Books, 2022)

Mohammed El-Kurd, *Rifqa* (Haymarket Books, 2021)

Ashraf Fayadh, *Instructions from Within* (trans. Mona Kareem and Mona Zaki, The Operating System, 2016)

Suheir Hammad, *Born Palestinian, Born Black* (UpSet Press, 2010)

Nathalie Handal, *Riflessi, Artist Book*, (Damocle Edizioni, San Polo, Venezia, 2016)

Fady Joudah, *Footnotes in the Order of Disappearance* (Milkweed Editions, 2018) and *The Earth in the Attic* (Yale University Press, 2008)
A. D. Lauren-Abunassar, *Coriolis* (University of Arkansas Press, 2023)
Tariq Luthun, *How the Water Holds Me* (Bull City Press, 2020)
Mira Mattar, *Affiliation* (Sad Press, UK, 2021), *And most of all I would miss the shadows of the tree's own leaves cast upon its trunk by the orange streetlight in the sweet blue darks of spring* (Veer2, UK, 2023)
Naomi Shihab Nye, *The Tiny Journalist* (Boa Editions, 2019), *19 Varieties of Gazelle* (Greenwillow Books, 2005)
Dareen Tatour, *The Last Invasion* (Nazareth: El Wattan Books, 2010), *My Threatening Poem* (Arabic, Tunis: Dyar Publishing and Distribution House, 2018), *Threatening Poem - Memoir of a Poet in Occupation Prisons* (English Version. Scotland: Drunk Muse Press, 2020)
Lena Khalaf Tuffaha, *SOMETHING ABOUT LIVING* (University of Akron Press, 2024)
Ghassan Zaqtan, *Like a Straw Bird It Follows Me* (trans. Fady Joudah, Yale University Press, 2013)

CONTRIBUTORS AND TRANSLATORS

Dina Abdulhadi is a Palestinian American writer and ex-scientist from the US South. A 2021 Brooklyn Poets Fellow, her writing has appeared in *Mizna*, *The Worcester Review*, and *Breakwater Review.* She is based in Brooklyn, NY.

Rasha Abdulhadi is a queer Palestinian Southerner disabled by long COVID. They are the author of *Shell Houses* and *who is owed springtime.*

George Abraham is a Palestinian American poet and memoirist who was born on unceded Timucuan lands (Jacksonville, FL). They are the author of *Birthright* (2020), which won the Arab American Book Award. They are currently executive editor of *Mizna* and teach at Amherst College.

Sarona Abuaker has been published in *MAP Magazine*, *theHythe*, and *KOHL*. She is the co-creator of the discussion-based card game, Countless Palestinian Futures, with Danah Abdulla. Her debut collection, *Why so few women on the street at night*, was published by the 87Press (2021).

Samer Abu Hawwash is a Palestinian writer and translator. He was born in Lebanon to a Palestinian refugee family. He has published ten volumes of poetry and is also a prolific translator of English-language fiction and non-fiction.

Heba Abu Nada is a novelist, poet, and educator. Her novel *Oxygen is Not for the Dead* won the Sharjah Award for Arab Creativity in 2017. She wrote the poem in this anthology on October 10, 2023. She died a martyr, killed in

her home in south Gaza by an Israeli raid on October 20, 2023. She was thirty-two-years old.

Sara Abou Rashed is a poet, speaker and creator of the one-woman show *A Map of Myself.* Her work appears in *A Land With A People*, McGraw-Hill curriculum, *Poetry, Kenyon Review* and elsewhere. An Ohioan, Sara earned her MFA at the University of Michigan.

leena aboutaleb is an Egyptian and Palestinian writer based between Amman and Cairo. She asks you to commit to the Palestinian liberation struggle. Her debut pamphlet "Expeditions of Projection" was published by *VIBE* in 2023. She was a 2025 Brooklyn Poets Fellow, a 2024 Tin House Summer Scholar, and a 2024 Kundiman fellow. Read her work at www.leenaboutaleb.onl

Maya Abu Al-Hayyat is a Beirut-born Palestinian novelist and poet living in Jerusalem. She is the author of four collections of poems, including *You Can Be the Last Leaf* (Milkweed, 2022), translated by Fady Joudah; four novels, including the latest, *No One Knows Their Blood Type* (Dar Al-Adab, 2013); and numerous children's stories. She is the director of Palestine Writing Workshop.

Jessica Abughattas is a poet of Palestinian heritage. Her first book, *Strip*, was the winner of the 2020 Etel Adnan Poetry Prize. A Kundiman fellow, her poems appear in *Guernica, Lit Hub, LA Review of Books, The Yale Review*, and elsewhere.

Mustafa Abu Sneineh is a poet from Jerusalem. He contributes to English and Arabic publications and works as a senior reporter, editor, and media strategist based in London. He has interviewed influential Arab writers and artists and published features, essays, and short stories. Two poems from his collection, *A Black Cloud at The End of The Line*, appear in this book.

Mosab Abu Toha is a Palestinian poet from Gaza. He is the author of *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear*, a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry. His work has been published in *Poetry, The Nation, NYRB*, among others.

Kareem James Abu-Zeid (trans.), PhD, is an award-winning translator of poets and novelists from across the Arab world who translates from Arabic, French, and German. The online hub for his work is kareemjamesabuzeid.com.

Rimona Afana is a Romanian Palestinian researcher, lecturer, activist, and multimedia artist working on war crimes, crimes against humanity, crimes against nature, and crimes against nonhuman animals.

Zena Agha is a Palestinian Iraqi writer, poet and artist. Her writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, *The Nation* and *The Margins*, among others. She is the author of *Objects from April and May* (Hajar Press, 2022).

Hala Akkawi is a longing-laden poet who draws inspiration from nature's elements. She is influenced by surrealist poetry such as Neruda's and Taghrid Abdul 'al's. Hala aspires to be a sociology teacher and a scriptwriter.

Nadeen Alalami is a Palestinian-Jordanian educator, research, and writer based in the UAE. Her poems have been published in *Airport Road, Rag Queen Periodical*, and *Nice Cage*. Her work explores themes of memory, migration, language, and legacy.

Tariq Alarabi is a poet and essayist in Nablus and a wholesale produce supplier. He completed his BA in journalism in 2008. His first poetry collection, *4AM in the Market*, won the Palestine Young Poet award in 2012.

Refaat Alareer gained his PhD with a dissertation on the poetry of John Donne. He taught English Literature at the Islamic University of Gaza, now destroyed. He was the editor of two collections of writing by his students, *Gaza Writes Back* and *Gaza Unsilenced* (both published by Just World Books). He tweeted @itranslate123 and via @munigaza. He was assassinated by the Zionist entity on December 6, 2023.

Islam al Khatib is a Palestinian refugee researcher born and raised in Beirut. She is interested in methodological interventions, speculation, and counter-apocalypses.

Ghayath Almadhoun is a Palestinian poet born in 1979 in Damascus, Syria. He emigrated to Sweden in 2008 and now divides his time between Berlin and Stockholm. Almadhoun has published five volumes of Arabic poetry, which have been translated into more than thirty languages. His latest book, *I Have Brought You a Severed Hand*, translated into English by Catherine Cobham, was published simultaneously in February 2025 by Action Books in the US and Divided Publishing in London and Brussels.

Ahmad Almallah grew up in Bethlehem, Palestine, and currently lives in Philadelphia, where he is an artist-in-residence at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of two poetry collections, *Bitter English* (University of Chicago Press, 2019) and *Border Wisdom* (Winter Editions, 2023).

Samih Al-Qasim was born in 1939 in Zarqa, Jordan, to Palestinian Druze parents from the Galilee. He grew up in the village of Rama in northern Palestine and was a leading figure of the resistance poets of the 1950s. He has written over thirty books of poetry, several novels, collections of plays and essays.

Lina AlSharif is Palestinian poet and teacher living in Qatar. She holds an MA in Creative Writing. She is published in *Mizna, Cordite Poetry*, and other regional publications.

Zaina Alsous is a labor organizer in South Florida and the author of the poetry collection *A Theory of Birds* (University of Arkansas Press, 2019), winner of the Norma Farber First Book Award and the Etel Adnan Poetry Prize.

Hala Alyan, a clinical psychologist, is the award-winning author of five poetry collections, two novels, and a memoir. Her most recent books are *The Moon That Turns You Back* and *I'll Tell You When I'm Home.*

Fadia M. Antabli, born in Jerusalem, Palestine, is an educator and poet who was uprooted from her homeland to Amman, Indianapolis, and Chicago. She writes in Arabic and English, and was a finalist for the Gwendolyn Brooks Award. She is an Associate Professor of Instruction in Arabic at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.

Yahya Ashour, born in Gaza in 1998, is a touring poet, award-winning children's author, writing mentor, and honorary fellow in writing at the University of Iowa. He has published two books, contributed to anthologies and journals, and has been translated into four languages.

Summer Awad is a writer with roots in Tennessee and Palestine. She is a third-year MFA candidate in Creative Writing and Environment at Iowa State University. She is the recipient of a 2023 LANDO Grant for migration, immigration, and refugee writing.

Asmaa Azaizeh is a poet, performer, and essayist based in Haifa. She is the author of three collections of poetry: *Liwa*, winner of the 2010 Al Qattan Foundation Debut Writer Award, *As The Woman from Lod Bore Me*, and *Don't Believe Me If I Talk To You of War.* Azaizeh was the first director of the Mahmoud Darwish Museum in Ramallah in 2012.

Zeina Azzam, a Palestinian American, is the poet laureate of Alexandria, Virginia, for 2022–25. She has two books of poetry: *Some Things Never*

Leave You (Tiger Bark Press, 2023) and *Bayna Bayna*, *In-Between* (The Poetry Box, 2021). Her work can be found at zeinaazzam.com.

Jordan Barger (trans.) is a translator of Norwegian and Danish, with an MFA in Literary Translation from the University of Iowa. Translations have appeared in *Poetry Magazine, Poetry Review UK, FENCE* and *Sleepingfish XX*. His translation of Sigbjørn Obstfelder's *The Red Drops* appeared onstage in Philadelphia thanks to Sewer Rats Productions.

Mourid Barghouti (1944–2021) was a major Palestinian poet and author of the memoir *I Saw Ramallah,* which won the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature.

Farah Barqawi is a Palestinian writer, poet, and performer. Her work has appeared in multiple languages. She wrote and performed her solo piece, "Baba, Come to Me" (2018–2020). She holds an MFA in nonfiction creative writing from New York University.

Bazeed (trans.) is a multi-award-winning Egyptian immigrant, poet, playwright, performance artist, actor, editor, translator, curator, and cook living in Brooklyn. They split their time between New York, Cairo, and managing their plant-hoarding tendencies.

Zeina Hashem Beck (trans.) is a Lebanese poet. Her third poetry collection, *O*, won the Arab American Book Award and was named a best book of the year by *LitHub* and *The New York Public Library.*

Jehan Bseiso is a poet, researcher, and aid worker. Her coauthored book, *I Remember My Name*, is a winner of the Palestine Book Award (2016). She is the co-editor *of Making Mirrors: Writing/Righting by and for Refugees* (2019).

Ahlam Bsharat is a memoirist, essayist, poet, and author of young adult fiction. Two of her young adult novels have been translated into English,

Code Name: Butterfly and *Trees for the Absentees* from Neem Tree Press. She is from Jiftlik.

Samer Budair (سـامر بديـر) is a Palestinian writer, poet, and subversive. He is a 2022 Arab American National Museum Youth Writing Fellow and the recipient of the 2023 CityWide Poets Scholarship. His work is committed to Palestine and Her liberation.

Catherine Cobham (trans.) is head of the Department of Arabic and Persian at the University of St. Andrews and has translated the works of many Arab writers inluding Naguib Mahfouz, Mahmoud Darwish, Fuad al-Takarli, Yusuf Idris, and others.

Thiri Daoud (trans.) is a translator of Dareen Tatour.

Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008) was the most acclaimed poet in the Arab world and widely considered to be on the shortlist for the Nobel Prize. During his lifetime, he published more than thirty books of poetry and prose, which have been translated into thirty-five languages. A former member of the Palestinian Liberation Organization's Executive Council and the Poet Laureate of Palestine, he helped draft the 1988 Palestinian Declaration of Independence. Darwish died in August 2008 following heart surgery. He was buried in the West Bank city of Ramallah and granted a state funeral.

Najwan Darwish is a poet from Jerusalem, Palestine. He has published eight poetry books in Arabic, and his work has been translated into over twenty languages. New York Review Books, which published the English translation of his books *Nothing More to Lose* (NYRB Poets, 2014) and *Exhausted on the Cross* (NYRB Poets, 2021), describes him as "one of the foremost Arabic-language poets."

Ahmad Diab is a writer, translator, and scholar of Arabic literature and culture. He teaches at University of California, Berkeley.

Tarik Dobbs is a writer, an artist, and a Poetry Foundation Ruth Lilly & Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellow. Their debut poetry collections, *Nazar Boy* (2024) and *Dearbornistan* (2026), are forthcoming from Haymarket Books.

Carolina Ebeid is a multimedia poet and author of *You Ask Me to Talk about the Interior* and the chapbook *Dauerwunder.* She edits poetry at The Rumpus. She is the current Bonderman Assistant Professor of poetry at Brown University for 2023–2025.

Yasmeen El-Hasan is rooted in Ya'bad and Beit Iba, Palestine, and grew up in Los Angeles, California. She received her BS and MA from Georgetown University in Washington, DC. She is currently based in Palestine, where she works in civil society.

A poet of the Palestinian diaspora, **Olivia Elias** writes in French. Born in Haifa in 1944, she lived until the age of sixteen in Lebanon, where her family took refuge in 1948, then in Montreal, before moving to France. Her books in English include *Chaos, Crossing* (World Poetry, 2022), translated by Kareem James Abu-Zeid, and the chapbook *Your Name, Palestine* (World Poetry, 2023), translated by Sarah Riggs and Jérémy Victor Robert.

Sara Elkamel (trans.) is a poet, journalist, and translator currently based in Cairo. She holds an MA in arts journalism from Columbia University and an MFA in poetry from New York University. She is the author of the chapbook *Field of No Justice* (2021).

Mohammed El-Kurd is an internationally touring and award-winning poet, writer, journalist, and organizer from Jerusalem, occupied Palestine. He is the Palestine correspondent for *The Nation* and writes primarily about dispossession in Jerusalem and colonization in Palestine. His debut book is a volume of poetry, *Rifqa* (Haymarket Books).

Sharif S. Elmusa is a scholar, writer, and poet. His work has appeared in numerous journals, magazines, and more than a dozen anthologies. He co-edited *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab-American Poetry*, and authored the poetry collection *Flawed Landscape.*

Samah Fadil is an Afro-Palestinian writer, editor, and translator who celebrates historically marginalized experiences through storytelling, poetry, and visual art. Her words can be read in *FIYAH, Palestine Square, Skin Deep, Mizna*, and more.

Huda Fakhreddine (trans.) is Associate Professor of Arabic literature at the University of Pennsylvania. She is a writer, a translator, and the author of several scholarly books.

Summer Farah is a Palestinian American writer, editor, and zine-maker from California. She is the author of *I could die today and live again* (Game Over Books, 2024) and *The Hungering Years* (Host Publications, 2026). A member of the Radius of Arab American Writers and the National Book Critics Circle, she is calling on you to recommit yourself to the liberation of the Palestinian people each day.

Ashraf Fayadh is a Palestinian poet and artist born in Saudi Arabia. He published two poetry collections, *Instructions Within* (2007) and *Epicrisis* (2019). In 2014, he was imprisoned in Saudi Arabia for charges of atheism and insulting God through his poems. He was sentenced to death, and after global outcry, his sentence was downgraded to eight years of imprisonment. He was released in 2022.

Eman Ghanayem is a Palestinian writer and scholar from the West Bank currently based in San Diego. Her writings and life's work center displacement, grief, and the power of Indigenous belonging and life.

Layla Azmi Goushey's creative work has been published in journals such as *Yellow Medicine Review, Mizna, Sukoon, FIYAH, Strange Horizons,* and

in *Beyond Memory: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Creative Non-fiction.* She is the editor of *Baladi Magazine.*

Katharine Halls (trans.) is an Arabic-to-English translator from Cardiff, Wales. Her critically acclaimed translation of Ahmed Naji's prison memoir *Rotten Evidence* was awarded the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award for autobiography. Her work has appeared in AGNI, *The Kenyon Review*, *The Believer*, *McSweeney's*, *The Common*, *Mousse*, *Frieze*, and elsewhere. She is one-third of teneleven, an agency for contemporary Arabic literature.

Maen Hammad is a documentary photographer, writer, and human rights campaigner. He has been documenting the Palestinian skateboard scene for the last eight years and engages in reciprocal nourishment with this community.

Suheir Hammad's books include *breaking poems, ZaatarDiva*, and *Drops of This Story.* An original writer and performer in the Tony award-winning *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry Jam* on Broadway, Suheir appears in the Cannes Film Festival Official Selection, *Salt of This Sea.* She has delivered her poetry to folks around the world.

Nathalie Handal is the author of award winning books, including *Life in a Country Album*, winner of the Palestine Book Award. She is a professor at New York University and writes the literary travel column "The City and the Writer" for *WWB*.

In addition to his posts at Wasafiri, as an editor-at-large, and at *Solarpunk Magazine*, **J. D. Harlock** is a poetry editor, his writing has been featured in *Strange Horizons*, *Star*Line*, and the *SFWA Blog.*

Kaleem Hawa is a Palestinian writer and poet. His essays have been published in the *New York Review of Books*, *The Nation*, and the *Journal of*

Palestine Studies. His poetry collection, *Maintenance*, is forthcoming with Fitzcarraldo Editions.

Heba Hayek is a Palestinian award-winning author, facilitator, and comms enthusiast whose work is rooted in decolonial and indigenous practices. Heba holds an MFA from Miami University, Ohio, where they also taught writing.

Hanan Hindi is Palestinian American mother, writer and an academic currently working in Northwestern University Qatar. Hindi's research focuses on postcolonial Middle Eastern literature, the Palestinian novel, short stories, and poetry.

Noor Hindi is a Palestinian American poet. Her debut collection of poems, *Dear God. Dear Bones. Dear Yellow* (Haymarket Books, 2022), was an honorable mention for the Arab American Book Award.

Palestinian writer **Sheikha Hlewa** was born in Dhayl 'Araj, an unrecognized Bedouin village near Haifa. She is the author of three collections of short stories and one collection of poems, which have been translated into many languages. She is a lecturer on Arab feminism at Ben-Gurion University.

Hasib Hourani lives and works on unceded Wurundjeri Country. He is a writer, editor, arts worker, and educator.

Annemarie Jacir is a writer and filmmaker based in Palestine. All three of her features were Palestine's submission to the Academy Awards. She shot the first feature by a Palestinian female director, the acclaimed *Salt of This* Sea, and her second work to debut in Cannes. Founder of Philistine Films, she collaborates regularly as editor, screenwriter, and producer with fellow filmmakers.

Bassam Jamil is a Palestinian writer living in the Galilee refugee camp near Baalbek, Lebanon. He has published two collections of short stories and a novel. His play *Death Boats* (2016) was shortlisted at the Sundance Festival in Morocco.

Lenna Jawdat is a Palestinian American poet and therapist in DC with a focus on trauma and identity. She has been published in *Poet Lore*, *Passengers Press*, and *Rogue Agent.* She is pursuing an MFA at the Institute of American Indian Arts and working on a book-length visual docu-poem.

Fady Joudah has several collections of poetry.

Mona Kareem (trans.) is a poet, translator, and journalist based in New York. She published two collections of Arabic poetry in 2002 and 2004, some of which were translated into French, Spanish, Dutch, German, Farsi, and Kurdish. Her third poetry collection, *Muharij al-Uzla* (the clown of solitude), is forthcoming this winter. She is a founding member of *Status Hour*, an academic audio journal. Mona pays her bills through teaching writing classes and researching migrant labor in the Middle East

Nazih Kassis (trans.) is a lexicographer, editor, translator, teacher trainer, poet, dictionary writer, member of Arabic Academy, English lecturer, and head of MEd program in English Language Education at the University of Haifa.

Mohammed Khader is a political strategist focusing on foreign policy and international politics. His writings explore issues in the world that shape his unique identity as a Black Mississippian and as a Palestinian.

Emily Khilfeh is a writer from Seattle, WA. She is the recipient of the Barjeel Art poetry prize and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and for Best New Poets.

A. D. Lauren-Abunassar is an Arab American poet and journalist. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Poetry, Narrative, Rattle, Boulevard,* and elsewhere. Her first book, *Coriolis*, was a winner of the 2023 Etel Adnan Poetry Prize.

Tariq Luthun is a Detroit-born, Dearborn-raised community organizer, data consultant, Emmy Award-winning poet, and the son of Palestinian Muslim immigrants from Gaza.

Lisa Suhair Majaj is a Palestinian American writer living in Cyprus. She is co-editor of three volumes of critical essays on women writers (*Intersections, Going Global*, and *Etel Adnan: Critical Essays)*, and the author of two poetry chapbooks. Her book *Geographies of Light* won the Del Sol Press Poetry Prize.

Nicole Mankinen (trans.) is a settler with European heritage living in Toronto, Canada. She is an editor and writer working in the arts/academic/UN/NGO sectors, and a lifelong ally and advocate for the Palestinian cause.

Mira Mattar writes fiction and poetry. She wrote *Yes, I Am A Destroyer* (Ma Bibliothèque, 2020), *Affiliation* (Sad Press, 2021), and *The Bow* (the87press, 2021). A new chapbook is forthcoming from Veer2.

Angie Mazakis's first book, *I Was Waiting to See What You Would Do First*, was named one of the Best Books of 2020 by the *Boston Globe.* Her poems and essays have appeared in the *Atlantic*, the *New Republic*, and *Iowa Review.* She hold a PhD from Ohio University.

Hajer Mirwali is a Palestinian and Iraqi writer living in Toronto. She has an MFA in creative writing from the University of Guelph. Her work has been published in *The Ex-Puritan, Brick Magazine, Room Magazine*, and *Joyland.* The poems in this anthology are from her debut collection, *Revolutions* (Tal-onbooks).

Janine Mogannam is a diasporic Palestinian poet and librarian from San Francisco, CA (Ramaytush Ohlone land). A member of the Radius of Arab American Writers and Still Here San Francisco, her writing can be found in *The Margins, Apogee, The Quarry, Ask the Night for a Dream,* and elsewhere.

Shereen Naser, PhD, is a proud mother of two beautiful children and a displaced Palestinian writer, activist, and mental health advocate.

Jaye Nasir is a writer from Portland, OR, whose work blurs, or outright ignores, the line between the real and the unreal. Her poems, essays, and fiction have appeared in many small publications, both local and international. She believes in ghosts.

Ibrahim Nasrallah was born in 1954 to Palestinian parents who were uprooted from their land in 1948. He spent his childhood and youth in the Alwehdat Palestinian refugee camp in Amman, Jordan, and began his working life as a teacher in Saudi Arabia. He has been a full-time writer since 2006, publishing fourteen poetry collections and twenty-two novels, which have won many awards.

Naomi Shihab Nye is a Palestinian American poet, editor, and educator living in San Antonio, Texas. Texas.

Aziza Okab (b.1990) is from Nazareth, Palestine. She currently lives in Brooklyn, NY, with her husband and two perfect cats.

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh's *Writing the Camp* (2021) was selected as one of the Best Poetry Books of 2021 by the *Telegraph* and the *Irish Times* and shortlisted for the Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize. His second book is *Eating the Archive* (2023).

Micaela Kaibni Raen is a Palestinian American queer-dyke, mother, author, artist, and community organizer. She creates Queer Tatreez—literary

artwork based on Tatreez patterns—and remains committed to global human rights for LGBTIQ communities.

Jeffrey Sacks (trans.) is associate professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Riverside.

Micaela Sahhar is a writer and educator who lives on unceded Wurundjeri Country. Her essays, articles, and poems have been widely published. Her first book, *Find Me at the Jaffa Gate: An Encyclopaedia of a Palestinian Family*, is published by NewSouth.

Nadia Said is a Palestinian living in Georgia. She grew up on hummus and fried chicken. She has a weakness for words, especially made-up ones, which is to say all of them.

Aiya Sakr is a Palestinian American poet and artist. She collects buttons and is enthusiastic about birds. She wants you to know that jumping spiders can see details on the moon. She is most active on Instagram: @aiyasakr

Sara M. Saleh is a Leb-Palo-Gypo writer living on Bidjigal land. She is the author of *Songs for the Dead and the Living* and *The Flirtation of Girls.* Sara made history as the first poet to win both the Peter Porter and Judith Wright Poetry Prizes.

Yusuf Ezidden Salah (1928–2016) was a Palestinian American poet whose poetry focused on Palestinian liberation and spirituality. He was born in Lyd, Palestine and, after losing nearly everything following the Nakba and 1967 war, fled his homeland and eventually settled in Chicago, IL. He did not write for the sake of writing, nor did he write out of a desire for fame or visibility. He was a spiritual poet committed to the national struggle of his people.

Suja Sawafta is a Palestinian American writer and critic. She is an assistant professor of Arabic Studies at the University of Miami and is the author of

Two Shores, One Sea: Longing for Palestine's Mediterranean (Bored Wolves, 2025). Her first academic monograph on the Jordanian-born Saudi-Iraqi novelist Abdulrahman Munif is forthcoming with Edinburgh University Press.

Yasmine Seale (trans.) is a British Syrian poet, translator, and critic. Among her translations from Arabic are *The Annotated Arabian Nights* (W. W. Norton) and *Something Evergreen Called Life*, a collection of poems by Rania Mamoun (Action Books). Other books include *Agitated Air: Poems After Ibn Arabi* (with Robin Moger, Tenement Press). She is currently a Visiting Professor at Columbia University.

Lamise Noor Shawahin, granddaughter of Yusef Ezideen Saleh, is a professor of psychology, community organizer, parent to an amazing human, and visual artist based in Chicago, IL.

Rema Ghassan Shbaita was acknowledged by the *Atlanta Review* as the Dan Veach Young Poet of 2019, does not consider dandelions weeds, and is allergic to grass. You can find some of Rema's work in *PacificREVIEW, the Mosaic Art & Lit Journal* and with the Inlandia Institute.

Deema K. Shehabi is the author of *Thirteen Departures From the Moon* and co-editor with Beau Beausoleil of *Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here*, for which she received the NCBR Recognition Award. She's also coauthor of *Diaspo/ Renga* with Marilyn Hacker.

Laila Shikaki is an award-winning published poet and assistant professor from Palestine. She currently teaches writing and literature classes at Birzeit University. Laila's poems have been featured in many literary magazines.

Mejdulene Bernard Shomali is a queer Palestinian poet and associate professor in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Williams College. She is the author of *Between Banat: Queer Arab Critique and Transnational Arab Archives* (Duke University Press 2023) and the poetry

chapbook *agriculture of grief: prayers for my father's dementia* (Finishing Line Press 2024).

Hind Shoufani is a Palestinian filmmaker and poet in NYC. She's an Oscar-nominated director-writer of Levantine feminist, secular, and political narratives. She digs liberation movements, batata, the skin on Mediterranean men, solitude, and Arab witches.

Mandy Shunnarah (they/them) is a Palestinian and Appalachian writer based in Columbus, Ohio. They're the author of *Midwest Shreds: Skating Through America's Heartland* and *We Had Mansions: Poems.* Read more at mandyshunnarah.com.

Jen Siraganian is the Los Gatos Poet Laureate, has been featured in *San Francisco Chronicle* and on NPR's *KALW*, and authored a chapbook titled *Fracture.* Her poems have appeared in *Best New Poets, Mid-American Review, Smartish Pace*, and other journals.

Veera Sulaiman is a Finnish Palestinian writer, organizer, Tatreez artist and herbalist. Her written work explores the intersections of mixed identity, language, intergenerational memory, animism, art as resistance and propaganda as art.

Dalia Taha is a Palestinian poet and playwright. She is the author of the collection *The Biography of the People of the City of R.* Her produced plays include *Graduation, Hunger: a Musical, There Is No One Between You and Me*, among others.

Dareen Tatour is a Palestinian poet, photographer, Political activist, and social media activist from Reineh, Palestine. In 2018, she was tried and convicted in an Israeli occupation court for inciting violence and supporting a terrorist organization, following the publication of a poem on social media. She was released in 2018 after serving a prison term.

Fargo Tbakhi is a queer Palestinian performance artist, a Taurus, and a cool breeze. Find more at fargotbakhi.com.

Lena Khalaf Tuffaha is a poet, essayist, and translator. She is the author of three books of poetry: *Water & Salt, Kaan and Her Sisters* (Trio House, 2023), and *Something About Living*, winner of the 2022 Akron Prize (University of Akron Press, 2024).

Priscilla Wathington's chapbook, *Paper and Stick*, draws on her advocacy work with NGOs such as DCIP, NRC and AAAN. Her poems have appeared in *Gulf Coast, Salamander, MQR*, and elsewhere. She is a RAWI board member and Warren Wilson MFA candidate.

Mona Zaki (trans.) is a translator of Ashraf Fayadh.

Born near Bethlehem, Palestinian poet, novelist, and editor **Ghassan Zaqtan** has lived in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Tunisia. A poet who writes primarily in Arabic, Zaqtan is the author of numerous collections of poetry. A supporter of the Palestinian resistance movement, Zaqtan has edited the Palestine Liberation Organization's literary magazine, *Bayader*, among others. Zaqtan has also served as director general of the Palestinian Ministry of Culture's Literature and Publishing Department. He lives in Ramallah.

Omar Zahzah is a writer, poet, and organizer of Lebanese Palestinian descent as well an assistant professor of Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas (AMED) Studies at San Francisco State University.

Rewa Zeinati is the author of the poetry chapbooks *Bullets & Orchids* (Corrupt Press, 2013) and *Difficult* (Diode Editions, 2023), and the founding editor of *Sukoon* magazine. Her poems and essays are published in a number of journals and anthologies in the US and elsewhere. She currently lives in metro Detroit.

Issam Zineh is a Palestinian American poet and clinician-scientist. He is author *of Unceded Land* (2022), Trio House Press Editors' Selection. He lives on the ancestral homeland of the Paskestikweya people.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF YUSUF EZIDDEN SALAH

This visual poem includes an image of Yusuf Ezidden Salah, who wrote “ya fatat al arab” long before he was to have four daughters, six granddaughters, and five great granddaughters. At the time of this writing, his descendants were all born to his daughters and granddaughters. The image includes items that serve as reminders of his life. Oranges to represent the groves he lost. A parakeet to represent his love of birds and the freedom they symbolize. He was known to neighborhood children as The Candy Man because he always gave children playing near his store candy. The first line of one of his poems, “Al Quds, Al Quds—How could I forget thee?” flows from a Papermate flair pen, his favorite type of pen with which to write his poems and notes. — Lamise Shawahin

A LOVE LETTER to Palestinian ancestors, their descendants, and their land; to all anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggles; to a history that will never be forgotten; and to a future in which there thrives a free, free Palestine.

In defiance of dispossession and decades of military siege, of unrelenting violence and thousands of martyred people, the "permission to narrate," as Edward Said wrote, is a necessary tool for self-determination. These poems reclaim that power, bridging borders, languages, and generations to forge new conversations around resistance and liberation.

As Palestinian history remains haunted by exile, violence, and grief, so, too, are the poems in this anthology. Editors George Abraham and Noor Hindi present these realities alongside queer and feminist perspectives, meditations on land, love, and time, and lineages of protest.

These poets dare to imagine a future beyond a nation-state for Palestinian people everywhere. Contributors include Refaat Alareer, Mahmoud Darwish, Naomi Shihab Nye, Mohammed El-Kurd, Lena Khalaf Tuffaha, Hala Alyan, Fady Joudah, Heba Abu Nada, and many others, both established and ascending.

"A ferocious reminder of what it means to be alive."
—**OMAR SAKR**, author of *Nightmare Sequence*

"To be Palestinian is to be a revolution."
—**RANDA JARRAR**, author of *Love Is an Ex-Country*

"A book every classroom, every library, and every poet should celebrate."
—**CATHY LINH CHE**, author of *Becoming Ghost*

GEORGE ABRAHAM is a Palestinian American poet and memoirist. They are the author of *Birthright*, which won the Arab American Book Award.

NOOR HINDI is a Palestinian American poet. Her collection of poems *Dear God. Dear Bones. Dear Yellow.* was an honorable mention for the Arab American Book Award.

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